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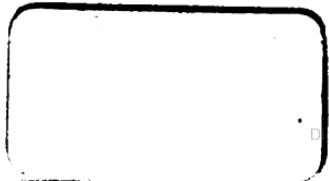
The spitfire

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THE SPITFIRE



VALDA

WITFIRE

ALDREDGE

1870. (See also *WITFIRE*)

PRINTED BY

WILLIAM CUDLER CHRISTY

NEW YORK

NEW YORK
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CHAPTER I

THE TEMPER OF MARCUS GIRARD

THE temper of old Marcus Girard was astonishing, to say the least, for it caused him to hurl a low-quarter shoe at the head of his hitherto faithful valet, one Torkins by name, one silent and inoffensive by nature, a lean, pale product of British servitude, who expected periodical outbursts on the part of his master, but not his shoes. At any rate, so astonished was Torkins by this unusual eruption that he forgot to dodge. This was unfortunate. His nose was large. His little rat eyes were close together. Therefore, the mark of the shoe heel embraced at least two-thirds of his servile countenance. He made no personal comment on his master's temper; but retired discreetly, to nurse his physical abrasion, and a mental wound which would far outlast the purple discoloration.

Now the incidents leading to this unfortunate affair occurred just two minutes before the opening of this narrative, and consequently

are lost. Let us, then, set them down to "nerves," a most probable surmise in view of the fact that several hundred persons in America and about the same number in England desired ardently to know the nature of Mr. Girard's personal business, and were foiled only by that gentleman's unremitting care, though the process caused the old fellow's temper to crackle after the manner of a steam radiator.

To begin with, he was a man of considerable wealth, as attested by the ownership of a splendid two hundred-foot yacht on which he crossed the Atlantic several times each year, and also by his passion for collecting curios and rare gems. That he was a personage of public and social importance was shown by his intimacy with the highest officials in the capital of Washington and a similar footing with certain titles and honorables in England. That his business weight was felt in the financial world could be easily demonstrated by the fact that his name figured frequently in the London Exchange and in Wall Street; but just what part he took in money upheavals remained a question of the wildest speculation. Some said he was a "financial mediator" between the money centers of the two nations, and called attention to his Wall Street and English interests by way of argu-

ment. Others dubbed him a "parochial diplomat," basing their theory on his close communion with the "high uppers" of Washington and his selfish disposition to suppress interesting fact. Others still said he was just plain crazy. Mr. Girard himself said they could take their choice—and be damned to 'em. So they did it. That he was a most irascible old gentleman could be proved by any who knew him—his valet by supreme preference.

As for outward appearance, any one who chose could judge. He confessed to sixty. He was stout, of a purplish complexion, with thin gray hair, and strong features terminating in a business jaw. He had large, pale, protruding eyes, and a voice—when opposed—that made him the envy of "carriage callers." Also he was a widower, and, to quote his own ungallant speech, he expected to remain so unless wedded under an anæsthetic.

The present party, which he had brought to England on his yacht, consisted of three ladies. First there was his daughter, Miss Valda, a slashing clean limbed specimen of young American womanhood, possessing beauty, wit, taste, and a real dressmaker. She was straight and tall, with a pair of big brown eyes that made her admirers happy and uncomfortable at the same time. She might not require an anæsthetic

to lead her to the altar; but no suitor yet had felt entirely competent to treat her case; therefore, she queened it, and was ripe in the joy of life. Next there was Aunt Mary Howard, Mr. Girard's half-sister, who confessed to no age whatever, though she gave fifty-five a close shave. She was tall and slender and stately; but, above all, placid to an extent that irritated Mr. Girard to the point of frenzy. "Mary," he said on one occasion, "at twelve o'clock on judgment day I'll bet you'll sniff placidly and say, 'Dear me! I believe I smell smoke!'"

Lastly, there was Miss Polly Thurman, a relative of Aunt Mary, just loosed from the cocoon of boarding school. She was tiny and plump, utterly irresponsible, very pretty, and very conscious of the latter fact. Her eyes were big and blue. Her voice was merrily metallic, a quality that sand-papered the soul of Marcus Girard and was unconducive to the concentration of business thought. He once remarked that a choice between Polly's shrill idiocy and Aunt Mary's cold blooded tranquillity would spell arsenic.

As for this queer old gentleman's private life, his business affairs were as much of a mystery to his own immediate family as to the outer world; yet, even with a secret profession, no calumny had ever attached itself to the name of

Marcus Girard, and not a single newspaper scandal, beyond one trifling exception.

The United States customs house officials had once discovered in his luggage a package containing about eighty thousand dollars' worth of undeclared gems; but, when the matter was brought to the owner's attention, he easily explained it by saying that he had entirely forgotten this addition to his gem collection in the worry of more important business. Furthermore, he paid the duty without a murmur, apologized for his carelessness, and the incident was closed; that is, to all except his daughter. On the next trip her honored parent again brought over an addition to his collection, and once more forgot to declare it, although the officials this time failed to discover the jewels or their owner's absent mindedness. This second lapse of memory troubled Miss Valda for a time; yet, having many interests in her happy, independent life, she too forgot the incident. Later she would be reminded of it.

At the present time, however, it could not be denied that Mr. Girard was acting strangely, and had been for the last two weeks. In a room in his suite of apartments in the Victoria Hotel, in London, he was closeted all day with queer specimens of humanity, from the thoroughbred to the mongrel, from swollen Lords to lean

cheeked financiers; thus by dinner time he was no congenial companion for three spirited ladies who desired to talk. Once, in answer to an innocent but raw question, he almost swore at Aunt Mary, but manfully choked it down while nearly choking himself with a full glass of port. Having no further use for the empty glass, he cast it into the fireplace and retired to his own apartment, where Torkins confidentially reported him to be "a-rampin' hup an' down an' profanin' somethink 'orrible."

At eleven-thirty he came out from his lair, entered his daughter's room, and sat down on the foot of her bed with his head in his hands. "Val," he began, composedly enough, "for God's sake do your old dad a favor by taking those two women away from me and keeping 'em there!"

"Very well," she answered dutifully. "Where do you suggest?"

"Take 'em to—"

He paused in time, and compromised on Greenland as a cheerfully distant abiding place for the time being; after which he cursed soulfully to himself in tense whispers, found a balm therein, and spoke rationally for the first time in three days.

"Val, my dear," he began again, "it isn't you who worry me, but those other two,—

those——” He digressed in whispers and resumed, “I need quiet and rest. I need every minute of my time, to work and think, and these infernal hounds—no, not the ladies, the other fellows—they are snapping at my brush! And they’ll get me too, if I’m not careful, and leave me an old bobtailed fool!”

This explanation of a perplexing business problem was anything but clear; yet Valda forbore to question him, knowing he would tell her as much or as little as he chose; and as usual he selected the latter.

“My dear,” he said, after a thoughtful pause; “some day, perhaps, I’ll tell you all about it; but in the meantime just take your Aunt Mary and that teetering little magpie on board the yacht, and clear out,—anywhere you like, Calais preferably,—yes, make it Calais,—and wait there till you hear from me.”

“All right, dad,” she agreed soothingly. “Let’s consider the matter closed.”

Whereupon she took his hand and drew him gently down beside her on the pillow, where she stroked his thinly covered head with a lingering, electric touch, and for forty splendid minutes she uttered not a syllable,—a difficult feat, no doubt, yet she understood her father as no one else on earth could understand, and she loved him as she loved no other man. So

at length old Marcus Girard sighed a sigh of peace, kissed Valda tenderly, patted her shoulder, and retired to his own apartment. True, he swore a little; but it did him good, and he went to sleep.

Next morning Valda routed out Aunt Mary and Polly at a most unchristian hour, tore them away from their comfortable hotel, bundled them unceremoniously on the yacht, and ordered breakfast while the anchor was being weighed. The yacht slipped sleepily away, crossed the English Channel, and came to rest again in the port of Calais, where she lay for ten idle days, and, metaphorically speaking, ate her head off.

If, however, the departure of the ladies was designed to bring peace of mind to Marcus Girard, one person, at least, failed to note its advent, and, as Torkins confided with tears to a hotel porter:

“The master ‘e’s gone bang luny, ‘e ‘as, an’ is makin’ of ‘is wally’s life one ‘opeless, ‘ideous ‘ell!”

This state of unhappiness culminated, as has been said, in a pair of highly decorated eyes, and a nose rendered positively Jewish in its contour and comparative proportion; then the troubled master departed from London hurriedly, leaving no address, and ordering his

mail and American cables to be held until his return.

Assured of Mr. Girard's decampment, the injured valet returned to the scene of disaster, putting it to rights with instinctive training, snivelling the while, and holding a haughty conference with an imaginary master. He restored two chairs to a normal position on their legs, performed several other offices of orderly adjustment, and finally picked up from the floor a newspaper which bore evidences of having been torn and crumpled in ungovernable wrath.

A sudden thought occurred to Torkins; for he seated himself at the center table, smoothed out the newspaper, and read it carefully from beginning to end. This task was somewhat difficult, by reason of the fact that he must peer over the top of two pieces of raw beefsteak which he was holding against his eyes, while swabbing from time to time with a silk handkerchief at the bridge of his damaged nose.

In the entire mass of reading matter there were only two articles to capture his attention; the first being a long and leathery editorial on delicate finance and international money complications fermented by the vagaries of the stock exchange; the second was a more readable item which in substance was as follows:

The Tivoli Arms, a modest hotel in an ob-

scure part of London, had on the previous evening been the scene of near-tragedy. A young man (name unknown) who was a transient guest and claiming to have carried a small fortune in gems, was attacked in his room and almost murdered by two masked ruffians. One of these assailants had been rendered unconscious by a well placed blow on the chin, while a moment later the young man himself was felled to the floor by the stroke of a heavy pistol butt, and the second assailant escaped with the booty by leaping from the second-story window. The struggle had caused quite a commotion at the Tivoli Arms, and many guests assembled in their night clothes; but the young man, on being revived, earnestly requested to be left alone with the injured burglar until the arrival of the police; and, to be exact, he had ordered the sympathetic guests from his room, under pain of a further commotion, and locked the door.

When several Scotland Yard officers promptly arrived three hours later, they received no response to their knockings; yet, when the door was broken in, they received a distinct surprise. The burglar was seated in the center of the room, gagged and bound securely to a chair, while the strange captor had utterly and mysteriously disappeared. No definite trace of him had been discovered up to a late hour, though

in the one clue left behind him lay the most remarkable part of the whole affair; for pinned to the injured burglar's breast was a placard bearing the following hurriedly scrawled inscription:

For the undivided attention of London cops. Hold goods until return of present owner. Doesn't look valuable; but he is.

The word "cops," the newspaper explained, was a vulgar slang employed in America, said to apply to that class of officers of the law known correctly in England as "bobbies."

In conclusion, the article stated that the whole affair was one of such unusual mystery as to cause grave doubts in the minds of certain officials as to whether or not any robbery had occurred at all. True, a row in the Tivoli Arms had certainly taken place, and two persons were undeniably wounded therein, as attested by twelve eye witnesses; yet, concerning the very existence of valuable gems purported to be stolen, there was room for question. The person left for the attention of London "cops" declined to speak, and the mysterious young man had vanished in the night, leaving no luggage or other clues of identification.

This was all that the newspaper contained. Now certainly, so far as a casual observer is concerned, there was nothing in either the financial editorial or the burglary item to excite

Marcus Girard to unseemly wrath, and clearly they were insufficient to cause him to discharge his footgear with intent to maim or kill; yet Torkins read both articles with the utmost care, and whistled softly. Then, on answering the knock of a bell boy, he entertained a visitor on his own account for the better part of two hours. On leaving, this visitor suggested cold raw oysters as being efficacious in reducing the inflammation in banged eyes. Torkins thanked him gratefully, then sat down and pondered for fifty minutes, rose, and smiled in spite of his physical unhappiness.

“ ‘Oly smoke!’ ” he observed, in imitation of his American master’s slang. “ An’ ‘im a-bashin’ me in the bugle with ‘is blarsted boot! ‘Oly smoke!’ ”

CHAPTER II

THE SPITFIRE

IN the opinion of at least one character connected with this story, it is difficult to say whether the chapter heading should apply to the girl or the yacht; but, in deference to the lady as yet barely introduced to us, suppose we call it the yacht.

The yacht, then, was called the Spitfire, and at three o'clock of a pleasant September afternoon she tugged gently at her anchor chain in the port of Calais, ten cable lengths from the lighthouse on the end of the mole. The Spitfire was not only a yacht, but a most superior kind of yacht. She could either steam or sail. She was fitted with double expansion engines and every other sort of expansive and expensive luxury. She carried a captain, two mates, and a complement of twenty seamen and servants, including one lady's maid, affording accommodations for the owner and nine or ten guests. Thus, internally, there was nothing to be desired.

Externally, she was regarded as a model, even by the most exacting of water bred savants. She was white, and clean, and natty. Her big red funnel indicated power and dignity. The saucy rake of her masts and cordage added that crown of feminine adoration—style. The rounded lines of her thin steel hull suggested the figure of a handsome woman laced snugly in a French corset. Thus, like the owner's daughter, the Spitfire was a slashing aristocrat, from mast-head to the impudent little bow gun employed in barking salutes to celebrities.

Joseph Larris, the grizzled, wind tanned sailing master, known better to his friends as Captain Joe, sat drowsing in a steamer chair on the shady side of the lower deck. He was lulled by the lazy lap of waves, and the purr of escaping steam which was kept up continually against the expected or unexpected coming of Marcus Girard; for, when that gentleman desired to go anywhere, delay was simply out of the question. Therefore it behooved Captain Joe to keep his steam up, his bunkers full, and his weather eye peeled for uncommon happenings; though it must be confessed that he was ill prepared for what really did occur.

The three ladies were on shore shopping; the seamen were below or dawdling over their light tasks aft; the yacht's decks presented the usual

deserted appearance of a vessel in port awaiting orders. The Captain was half aroused from his doze by the grating of a boat against the yacht's side, and he cocked his ears for the voice of Miss Valda and the crickety laugh of little Miss Polly Thurman. But he heard neither voice nor laughter; instead, he was startled by a sudden thump as a large leather valise shot over the rail and all but landed on his personal, pet bunion. He rose and stared at this unexpected bit of luggage, then stared harder still as a stranger stepped nimbly up the ladder and smiled at him.

The Captain continued to gaze in mute wonder. He saw before him a tall, faultlessly dressed gentleman, with a clean shaven face, iron gray hair, a pair of dark, intelligent eyes, and an exasperating air of ease. The handsome personage did not speak to the Captain immediately, but leaned on the rail and addressed two men in the boat, while carelessly tossing them half a dozen franc pieces:

“Thank you, boys. Just drink my health and wait for Mr. Tracy. He ought to be along in half an hour. When he comes, hurry!”

The oars dipped, and the graceful stranger turned to the Spitfire's sailing master.

“This is Captain Joe, I believe?”

“It is,” admitted that officer, but without any

marked degree of cordiality. "And who might you be?"

"Why," began the other, elevating his brows in polite astonishment, "I am Mr. Ormond!"

He held out his hand in a condescending, confident manner as though he expected Captain Joe to grasp it, if not to kiss it; but the Captain did neither. He placed his own hands behind his back and coolly regarded the stranger from top to toe.

"What do you mean?" demanded Ormond angrily.

"That never having the pleasure of laying eyes on you before," replied the Captain, "you'll excuse me for not holding hands with you, Mr. Ormond."

The visitor's eyes narrowed into slits. "Well, confound your impudence! Is this the manner in which the guests of Mr. Girard are usually received? By George! I'll see that you smart for this!"

He turned on his heel and left the Captain in a quandary. The sailing master was a cautious man, especially with strangers, a man who minded his own affairs and protected his master's interests as he would his own; yet Mr. Girard was a person of eccentricities, and, if the coming of Mr. Ormond was one of them, then Joseph Larris was committing a grievous

breach of etiquette. Therefore he shook his head and approached the visitor with a sort of choked humility :

“I meant no impudence, sir, and hope you will so take it; but what with Mr. Girard in London, ordering me to wait for him, and in a foreign country, with so many sharpers about, you’ll pardon a man for being a bit careful, sir.”

Ormond checked an angry retort, regarded the Captain critically, and smiled. “Oh! I begin to see. Haven’t you received instructions from Mr. Girard?”

“No, sir, I haven’t.”

This time the stranger laughed—and, by the way, it was rather a pleasing laugh.

“Then that accounts for it,” he said, as he once more turned to the troubled officer. “It’s all right, Captain. I understand perfectly. Listen to this.” He produced a telegram and began to read, as follows :

MR. JAMES ORMOND,

Hotel du Bois, Calais, France.

Spitfire in port—just off mole. Clears to-night. Tracy to meet you. Go on board and take full charge of—

“What!” roared Captain Joe. “Take full charge of this yacht! You, sir? And me the sailing master! Why, sir——”

“Exactly,” interrupted Ormond, smiling. “Listen to the rest”:

—take full charge of course and anchorage. Have wired instructions to Valda and Captain Larris. See you in New York—twentieth.

MARCUS GIRARD.

“There you are,” concluded the stranger.
“Read it for yourself.”

Captain Joe took the telegram as directed, read it twice through in silence, and handed it back again.

“I’m not denying it’s on the paper, sir, I’m not denying it; but——”

He paused and left the rest to imagination. Ormond nodded indulgently.

“Right, my friend. I commend your caution. I know, of course, that my introduction may seem a trifle unusual; but the interests of Mr. Girard have made it necessary, and I think you will find everything correct and shipshape. Is Miss Valda aboard?”

“No, sir, she’s ashore.”

“When will she return?”

“She’s shopping, sir.”

That settled it. So far as masculine experience was concerned, the visitor was prepared to expect her in five minutes or five hours, as the exigencies of the feminine art of purchase demanded. He seated himself in a steamer chair and produced his cigar case.

“Smoke?”

“Thank you, no,” returned the Captain, with

a shade of gruffness. "When I smoke, I smoke a pipe."

"Oho!" laughed the attractive stranger. "No wonder you are suspicious of human nature! But, by the way, if you want to wire Mr. Girard, you had better do so at once. He sails this evening at eight—for New York."

"What?"

"Just so," reiterated Ormond, glancing at his watch. "You will probably catch him at his hotel—the Victoria."

The Captain drew in his breath sharply. "I—I think I will wait for Miss Valda, sir."

"Oh, just as you like," said Ormond with irritating carelessness. "It's all one to me, you know. I merely thought you might like to verify this despatch of mine. Pray, pardon my presumption in suggesting it."

Whereupon the cool interloper assumed an air of further refrigeration, took out a newspaper, and proceeded to ignore Captain Joe as completely as though he were a part of the polished deck rail.

The Captain waited for a few uncomfortable moments, then climbed slowly to the bridge, where he stood for half an hour scratching his rough blue chin in troubled thought. That Mr. Girard would sail for New York on a regular ocean steamer when he might cross the Channel

and travel at ease on his own yacht, was past belief. That he should not only do this, but send an utterly unknown man to dictate sailing orders and lord it over three ladies and an entire crew, was simply preposterous. Yet, on the other hand, Mr. Girard's mysterious business affairs might lead him to give orders which a mere sailing master was not supposed to criticise, no matter how apparently mad such orders chanced to be.

Captain Joe did not like this stranger. Just why, he was unable to say. True, the man possessed polish; but so did the brass deck rail; and, to the seaman's untutored mind, the man possessed more brass than polish. What if he was a rank impostor, seeking his end, whatever it might be, by a forged despatch? Still, Ormond himself had suggested the only possible means of verifying the truth. This was certainly open and aboveboard; yet the Captain was not convinced. He was in two minds as to whether he should wait quietly for further instructions, or chuck the fellow overboard and save further trouble; but, as the process of chucking could be accomplished at any time, he wisely decided to wait.

He was glad of this decision, for presently he spied the yacht's dinghy come bobbing over the waves, and sighed as he caught the flutter

of veils and the echo of youthful merriment. In a few minutes after he descended to the break in the rail, giving a helping hand to the ladies as they came over the side, while James Ormond, peeping from behind his newspaper, remained a passive though deeply interested spectator. The foremost of the ladies to catch his eyes was Miss Valda Girard herself, slender, straight-backed, square-shouldered, an ideal product of healthy, vigorous American girlhood, from the brim of her rakish yachting cap to the tip of her rubber soled canvas shoes. There is character in shoes, and these particular shoes were not tiny. They were good, honest fives—the kind that a daughter of freedom might stand in squarely and fight for her independent principles.

“Captain Joe,” she was saying, “I dare say you thought we were lost for good and all; but— Why, what’s the matter?”

The Captain, instead of his usual joviality, had nodded in solemn gloom and jerked his thumb in the direction of his unconventional guest. In an instant more that person was looking into a pair of fearless brown eyes and grasping a firm, slim hand extended in cordial greeting.

“This is Mr. Ormond, is it not?”

He bowed over her hand in acknowledgment

of identity and responded with a gallant smile. "And this, beyond a doubt, is Miss Valda; for indeed I have spoken of you so often with your good father that I seem to have known you for a lifetime."

"Thank you," she answered. "I'm happy to welcome you as a member of our little party. Let me present you to the others. This is my aunt, Miss Howard; Mr. Ormond, a friend of father's."

Aunt Mary came forward cordially and gave her hand, both murmuring their pleasure at meeting, while Captain Joe looked on in profound amaze, his jaw stretching wider every second.

"Come, Polly," called Valda; and Polly came with a bounce. She was delighted to catch at any chance of any man at any age whatever, so long as he broke up a three-cornered conversation with a woman at each corner.

"Mr. Ormond," she chirped, "I do believe you have dropped down right out of the skies on purpose to banish the sleepy horribleness of a hen party!"

"My dear young lady," he answered, with a flattering inclination of his head and body, "I shall do my best to crow for you at all times." Then, amid the resultant laughter, he turned to Valda, with a twinkle in his eye, "And now I

beg you to present me to your worthy Captain, who is, I fear, just a little doubtful as to my moral character."

"Why, Captain Joe!" exclaimed Valda chidingly, and that officer shuffled forward, blushing to the ears; but Ormond came to his rescue, slapping him on the back and declaring that they were now even, and on a better footing, which he hoped would last till the end of a happy voyage.

"You see, Miss Girard," he offered in explanation, "your father's telegram was rather mystifying, and—"

"Oh, yes," she interrupted; "so was mine. Funny to be introduced by wire, isn't it?"

From her hand bag she produced two telegrams, reading one aloud:

Ormond and Tracy coming aboard. On arrival leave Calais at once. No delay. Imperative. My good friend Ormond to take charge of Spitfire. Don't worry.

FATHER.

"You see, Captain," she said, turning to the silent officer, "I dropped into the telegraph office a few minutes ago, and found two messages. I confess at first that I was as much in the dark as you are; but this, no doubt, will throw some light on the subject."

She handed him the second telegram and watched him read it twice, while a frown of annoyance ridged his brow.

“Well, Captain Joe?”

“Shall I read it aloud?” he asked.

“Yes, of course,” she laughed. “Among friends there are no secrets.”

The old salt was not so sure of this; but he sighed to himself and did her bidding. The wire was in cipher; but, being translated, read as follows:

CAPTAIN JOSEPH LARRIS,
Yacht Spitfire, Calais, France.

James Ormond to take full charge. No questions. Reach New York by twentieth. Fly private signals and lie off Sandy Hook till further orders. Drive her as hard as hell will let you. MARCUS GIRARD.

The message was characteristic, eminently so; yet for a full half-minute after its reading there was a silence of astonishment; then every one laughed; that is to say, all but Captain Larris, who acted strangely. He bowed to Ormond with the utmost respect and deference, then turned on his heel and descended to the engine room, swearing softly under his breath.

Valda was amused. She alone understood her father, or thought she did, and knew he was driven to the verge of nervous prostration by business complications; and had he ordered her to meet him at Tierra del Fuego, she would merely have adjusted her apparel to a warmer climate and obeyed implicitly. For the present she turned to her guest with a mock obeisance:

“Any orders, Captain Ormond?”

“None for you, at least,” he answered in a spirit of levity in keeping with her own; “but, if you don’t mind, we might make ready to weigh anchor the moment my secretary, Mr. Tracy, arrives.”

Up to this point Tracy had been completely forgotten by the ladies; but now they apologized and asked for information.

“I can’t imagine what is keeping him,” said Ormond, glancing earnestly toward the shore and back at Valda. “He was with your father this morning, and should certainly be here by four o’clock.” Ormond paused to smile. “You will find him rather a rough diamond, I fear; yet his slight uncouthness is more than balanced by his devotion to Mr. Girard’s interests as well as to my own. I hope you will like him—for your father’s sake.”

This was delicately put, and Valda determined to overlook such shortcomings as might appear, in her own devotion to her busy parent. After some further speculation as to the dilatory one, Ormond was shown to Mr. Girard’s private cabin adjoining the officers’ quarters, where he, too, acted strangely. He gave scarcely a glance at the sumptuous appointments on every hand, but thrust his face to a porthole and gazed eagerly toward the shore.

"Now, what the devil," he muttered to himself, "has become of that chuckle-headed ass?"

Meanwhile, Miss Valda Girard and Captain Larris were seated in earnest consultation behind closed doors. The Captain did not relish the state of affairs, and said so with vigor and conviction. The whole thing, he declared, might be a scheme to get possession of the yacht; but, as Valda argued, such a scheme was not only improbable, but impossible, in face of a crew of able bodied and loyal seamen. Furthermore, there was no reason why Ormond should want the yacht at all. No, she believed the matter, though confessedly freakish, was merely a business necessity, which her father would eventually explain. The guest was a most agreeable and presentable person, who would doubtless lessen the tedium of the voyage immensely, and Valda saw no reason to doubt his statements. However, she was open to conviction, and readily agreed to a suggestion of the Captain's that would clinch the matter for once and all.

Together they prepared a carefully worded despatch in the yacht's cipher code, asking for verification of previous orders, and sent it ashore by the second mate with instructions to wait for Mr. Girard's answer. In the course of

an hour it came, also in cipher, addressed to Valda, and was brief but comprehensive.

Don't be an idiot. Do as I tell you. MARCUS GIRARD.

“Captain Joe,” asked Valda solemnly, but with a dash of mischief in her big brown eyes, “do you doubt that dad wrote this?”

The old sea dog pondered for a full minute, then answered strangely and without humor, “Oh, it's *him* all right enough, I'm not denying it; but I wish to God, Miss Valda, I could wake up and find that *I* was drunk!”

Now the strangeness of the remark lay partly in the emphasis on the two personal pronouns. Valda thought it out, and grew suspicious of Captain Joe's sense of deference to her parent.

CHAPTER III

A HERO PRO TEM.

THE same boat which brought Mr. Girard's conclusive despatch brought also a passenger—a medium sized, unimportant little personage of stocky proportions and a contradictory air of nervous alertness. In short, he was Mr. Tracy—the “chuckle-headed ass” alluded to through the porthole.

Immediately upon his arrival, however, some latent importance seemed to assert itself; for the Spitfire was ordered under weigh. Captain Joe stood on the bridge and barked a few grudging commands. The trained seamen winched in the anchor and neatly coiled the lines, while the yacht's nose swung slowly to the outgoing tide. There was a jingle of bells, a snoring rumble of the screw, a Banshee scream of the siren whistle, and the Spitfire took a bone in her teeth and started out to sea.

While this was in progress Ormond and Tracy were in close communion, so to speak, and their cabin door was locked. They sat together and spoke in earnest undertones; that is to say,

Tracy carried the burden of an interesting narrative, while Ormond played a sort of profane accompaniment with a staccato movement. Whatever had happened, though, Tracy was clearly not to blame; for, in emulation of the angels, he had done his best; but Ormond failed to appreciate the simile and repeated his port-hole criticism in varying keys of uncomplimentary discord. In conclusion he called Mr. Tracy's attention to the exigences of the future, then delivered a somewhat ambiguous suggestion:

"Tracy," he said, "in your capacity of private secretary, you can best serve the interests of all parties concerned by keeping your damned mouth shut! Understand?"

Mr. Tracy seemed to understand perfectly, and together the two went out on deck, where they were just in time, for something unusual was taking place. The Spitfire was now a short quarter of a mile distant from her previous anchorage, but had suddenly been reduced to half speed.

"What is it?" asked Mr. Ormond.

Valda, who was standing at the rail with Aunt Mary and Miss Polly, pointed toward the mole, where beside the lighthouse stood a little signal station, and from a staff on its roof several small flags were flying. In addition to

this a puffy French official came tearing down the quay, frantically waving his uniformed arms. Captain Joe stepped to the rail of his bridge and offered an explanation:

“They are asking us to stop, sir. Shall I lay to?”

“Certainly not!” returned Ormond placidly. “Full steam ahead.”

The ladies turned in astonishment, and even the common seamen stared, while Captain Joe turned livid.

“But, man alive,” he roared, “they are *ordering* us to stop!”

The guest in command looked up at him and answered very quietly: “I think you heard me, Captain Larris. Full steam ahead!”

The old officer neglected his cheerfully nautical “Aye, aye, sir,” closed his glass with a vicious snap, and turned abruptly, thrusting his grizzled head through a window of the pilot-house.

“Mr. Lavine,” he said to the second mate, who had the wheel, “go ahead, if you please, and tear the insides out of her!”

This might appear to be rather a reckless injunction on the part of a cautious sailing master; but Captain Joe was overwrought. The wheelman asked no questions, and the Spitfire went forward with a jump.

“Miss Girard,” said Ormond, with a half apologetic smile, “were your father in my place, believe me, he would have done the same.”

Here let us remark that this was indisputably true; for Marcus Girard, in Ormond’s place, would have clapped on sail to assist his double expansion engines, and he even might have wet the sails. His daughter, however, was ignorant of many things, and accepted the situation stoically, striving to entertain her father’s friends, and to forget the incident, which she did until another of more importance took the center of the stage; and not only did this new occurrence appropriate that envious point of stardom, but monopolized the limelight and the services of some twenty odd unwilling supers.

It was perhaps five o’clock (by intelligible land time) when the sun was dodging in and out of a bank of clouds, as if hiding mischievously before being sent to bed. The sea was comparatively calm, making believe that it never could make anybody sick enough to want to die, and a general air of peace was hanging round after the manner of an amiable fog.

Now you may happen to know, Reader (gentle or otherwise, as the cap fits you), that this is just the sort of time things always select to happen in. This thing did, anyway, and there is no

argument about it whatever. The lookout in the bow bawled something to the Captain. The Captain adjusted his glass and looked off to starboard, while everybody else collected at the rail and looked off to starboard too. At first there seemed nothing unusual in the sight of an ugly little black tugboat swaggering through the waves; but when it came into broadside line the spectators were rewarded for their interest, for on the somewhat restricted stern deck there seemed to be quite a commotion, involving six men, five with voices and one with a threatening coal shovel.

“Oh, look!” cried Valda, trembling with excitement. “They are fighting!”

“Good gracious, so they are!” agreed Polly, clinging to her arm. “What are they doing it for?”

No one vouchsafed an answer; but the fact remained that the six men in question had adequate reasons, as attested by a writhing jumble of arms and legs and the fragments of personal disapproval which came floating across the waters. The entire yacht’s company grew humanly absorbed. Excited sailors swarmed up into the rigging or other points of convenient vantage; while even the cook, in defiance of strict orders, rushed out on deck carrying a smoking pan with which he inadvertently

burned the cockney steward and was criticised soulfully therefor.

Then suddenly, before the very eyes of the yacht's company, was reinacted an old, old, biblical incident. The five boatmen seized upon a struggling prophet, lifted him bodily, and cast him to the whales.

The Jonah lit with a splash, sank, shot upward, spat salt water, and cursed his enemies with a finish which his original could never have achieved, while the impudent tug spun round on her impudent tail and swaggered away on her path of righteousness.

“Oh, dear!” shrilled Aunt Mary, covering her eyes with both her hands. “They are leaving him to drown! Help! Some one go after him instantly! Oh! Oh!”

The second mate, with the instinct of seafaring courtesy, had already jingled a bell for half speed, when Ormond called to the Captain on the bridge:

“Straight ahead, Captain. Our time is valuable!”

“But, sir——”

“Full steam ahead, I tell you! Throw the man a life preserver, and let him take care of himself. I’m sorry to give such an order; but——”

“*Mr. Ormond!*”

It was Valda Girard who spoke, and her words came like the crack of a pistol shot, with the powder of womanly wrath behind it. She was standing in her fighting shoes, and even parental instructions might wither and go hang.

“Captain Larris,” she commanded, “we will stop and pick up that man!”

The seamen, who had listened in open mouthed wonder at Ormond’s apparently brutal orders, burst forth into a rousing cheer, but bit it off quickly at the sound of the Captain’s voice.

“Aye, aye,” he had answered Valda, crisply and with joy, as he leaped for a window of the pilot house. “Ease her, Mr. Lavine! Slow down! Ware away three points north and choke her!” Again the human little bells jingled sharply. The wheel spokes spun. The astonished propeller reversed itself and kicked up an angry froth. The Captain wheeled and bellowed to the running seamen: “Man the davits on the weather bow! Look sharp, lads! Stand by the tackles and ease her off! Take charge, Mr. Beasley! Let her go!”

Four seamen with the first mate sprang into their places. The small-boat bearing the Spitfire’s name swung free of its davits and descended with a gentle flop into the sea, while

the yacht, freed of her master power, rolled easily in the trough of caressing waves.

“Where is he?” cried Polly, endangering her own young life in scrambling to a point of better observation on the rail. “Oh, there he is! Look! Look!”

“What is he doing?” wailed Aunt Mary, still holding her hands before her eyes, yet perishing with human curiosity.

Now there was no doubt whatever as to what Mr. Jonah was doing, for he was in full view, and his actions spoke for themselves. With one powerful hand he was keeping himself afloat, and with the other was engaged in shooting at the tugboat with a heavy but wet revolver, while his mocking persecutors desisted suddenly in their coarse laughter and dived for the engine room. “Things,” as Miss Polly expressed it tritely, “were happening.”

“He sees us!” she cried. “He sees us!” Then, as the small-boat neared him, the three ladies huddled together and called out hysterically, sometimes singly and at others in shrill concert: “Hurry, men! Row as fast as ever you can! They’ve got him! They’re taking him in! Oh, I’m so glad! So glad!” the ladies shouted, with other inane and idiotic observations which are usually in vogue when a person is being rescued.

As the triumphant boat came bobbing back, there fell a silence of expectancy; and yet not quite, for behind the smokestack Ormond and Tracy were engaged in an earnest, low toned argument.

"But it can't make any difference," claimed Tracy. "We pick up a strange man, and——"

"Well, it *can* make a difference!" the other whispered hotly. "I don't know—I'm worried about Martin. He ought to have been more careful. If——"

"Nonsense, Jim! Why——"

"For God's sake don't call me Jim! If only you had brains enough to——"

But here the interesting conversation ended abruptly as the rescuing boat grated along the yacht's side and the sympathetic ladies called to those below:

"Is he all right, Mr. Beasley? Is he conscious?"

The answer came in the form of a ringing, full-throated laugh, and a further verbal assurance expressed in a musically deep voice:

"Sound as a trivet, thank you. I'll be up in a minute to prove it in person."

So the ladies waited.

"Stand by for the painter!" called Captain Joe from the bridge. "Cleat it, you lubbers! Hold her fast!"

Whatever these directions meant, the seamen executed them with willingness and despatch, and in a moment more Mr. Jonah ran nimbly up the ladder and stood on deck.

He was a man of perhaps twenty-six years, tanned to a healthy brown and standing a good six feet in his sooping shoes. He was hatless, coatless. His outing shirt, torn literally to ribbons by his friends of the tugboat, disclosed a view of deep, wide chest and shoulders, while his sinewy arms swung easily at his narrow hips. His head was poised much as Valda's was—carelessly, but with power—and the face was one which any woman would remember. It was fresh and fearless, pleasing in every line, from the steady gray eyes to the firm square chin which was marked with a heavy crease. It was a handsome face, and besides it wore a dash of impishness, as though its owner found a modicum of humor, even in being drowned.

So the ladies gave him a smile of welcome. Yes, they did; for show us a woman, of any age or of any clime, who does not appreciate the goodly figure of a man. Therefore the ladies smiled upon Jonah, and were glad he came.

If the ladies were pleased, however, one gentleman was not. He peered from behind the smokestack, grew slightly pale, and whispered hoarsely:

“*Hell!* Do you know who that is?”

“Who?”

“It’s Brown!”

“Brown? *What* Brown?”

“Why, him—the chap that——”

“Keep your damned mouth shut!” enjoined Mr. Ormond for the second time, and Tracy, who was in the very act of opening it again, wisely obeyed instructions. The Captain was looking in their direction, and the newest newcomer on the Spitfire was speaking to the ladies:

“I beg to apologize, both for my rumpled and moist condition and this somewhat unconventional manner of intrusion. May I ask where I am?”

“You certainly may,” said Valda, smiling cordially. “This is the private yacht Spitfire, and I am the owner’s daughter—Miss Girard.”

“Delighted, Miss Girard, believe me,” he answered, with a bow. “Mine is Bruce Morson—of Virginia.”

Valda acknowledged the informal introduction; then, as she knew the others were burning for information, she asked how he chanced to be thrown from the passing tug. Mr. Morson laughed.

“Do you know,” he began, “it is rather a serious matter, and is only saved by—well—by

the humor of it. I am on a business trip, and was most anxious to catch this evening's steamer from Calais. I missed the midday boat at Dover and engaged that tug to ferry me across the channel. Paid a hundred dollars, and foolishly gave it in advance. Awhile ago that shark of a Captain doubled his price. Naturally I refused to be swindled a second time. The argument became spirited. The result you witnessed. It was ridiculous, but inevitable."

"I think it was an outrageous shame!" declared Aunt Mary, without even being introduced to the handsome victim.

"Thank you, madam," he returned, with the utmost deference to her age and common sense. "I agree with you most heartily."

At this moment, to the utter astonishment of every one, Ormond strolled up as if nothing had happened and took part in the conversation.

"Quite a remarkable experience," he observed. "What do you intend doing now?"

"I am," declared the young man suavely, with a graceful wave of his hand toward the ladies, "at the mercy of the angels. Whither are you bound, and when do you expect to get there?"

"New York," Ormond informed him. "We hope to make it by the twentieth."

“Bully!” exclaimed Morson, forgetting himself in his evident satisfaction. “That suits me exactly, if you’ll take me as a passenger. I’m in a position to pay in wet bills, or”—he paused slightly—“or I am perfectly willing to work my passage.”

Here Valda cut in on her own account.

“Neither, I think, will be necessary, Mr. Morson.” She checked his thanks and proceeded, with an icy formality in her tones: “Allow me to present you to Mr. Ormond, who was, until a few moments ago, in charge of my father’s yacht.”

Ormond ignored this pointed reference to his fall from official grace, shook hands cordially, and expressed himself as being greatly pleased in being of service to a castaway.

“And now,” he said, by way of dismissing the matter finally, “I suggest that one of the seamen find you a dry costume.”

This, no doubt, was meant in kindness; but, in view of his inexplicable conduct in refusing to pick up a drowning man, Valda was disposed to place a different construction upon his present attitude.

“Mr. Ormond,” she said, “I hardly think the costume of a sailor will suit Mr. Morson at all.” She turned to the mate beside her and issued an order which later bore strange fruit: “Mr. Beas-



Valda Remembered That Bow Afterward

ley, you will kindly take this gentleman to your own cabin and fit him out as best you can."

Bruce Morson stepped back a pace, in sheer astonishment, then smiled and inclined his head.

"Miss Girard," he answered, in low toned earnestness, "there are no words in which a gentleman may express his appreciation of your courtesy."

"My father," she returned, with a sidelong glance of contempt at Mr. Ormond, "is always glad to welcome *gentlemen* as his guests."

Mr. Ormond shrugged and turned away. There was more in the matter than he could explain in the presence of the newcomer; so he bore the lash in silence, reserving his vindication for a future time.

As for the castaway, he did not try to answer his generous hostess; but he made her a sweeping bow. It was the kind of bow in which men of the South pay tribute to gentlewomen of their own people—a courtly bow, loaded to the throat with deference, yet in it there was not one single vestige of humility.

Valda remembered that bow afterward. She tried to forget it, but she failed.

CHAPTER IV

MR. ORMOND'S SEESAW RISE TO GRACE

AS may have been noted, the coming of Mr. Bruce Morson affected the various members of the yacht's party in varying ways, according to his or her separate and distinctive point of view. The Messrs. Ormond and Tracy were clearly troubled; but that was their own affair, which could be rebutted later on. Captain Joe received the castaway with open arms, if for no other reason than that his advent tended to nip the authority of Ormond with a joyful frost. Valda was serenely contented with herself at being instrumental in saving a human life; and, if this human life chanced to be a young and extremely good looking one, she, of course, was in nowise to blame. She had no hand whatever in the selection. Aunt Mary was politely, placidly, perfectly, pleased.

“My dear,” she observed to Valda, “I approve of that young man. His name is a good one. I happen to know, personally, that both the Bruces and the Morsons are most delightful and aristocratic families. I am very glad in-

deed, my child, that you declined to have him dressed as a common sailor."

"I had my reasons, Aunt Mary," said Valda, with a grim expression about her mouth, "and I wanted Mr. Ormond to *understand* my reasons."

"I should think so!" exclaimed Miss Polly, in a mixture of approval and indignation. "The idea of Mr. Ormond not wanting to stop and save a drowning man! It was simply horrid! Besides, I call it luck to pick up a young fellow like that and right out of the sea too! Oh, goody!"

This last young lady took a more material view of the day's occurrence than any one else on board. That an otherwise uneventful ocean trip should be miraculously transformed by the arrival of three separate pairs of trousers was, to put it mildly, a special dispensation of Providence, seeming to her optimistic soul like manna distributed to the desert bound, hungry little children of Israel. *Three men!* All in a bunch! Yea, truly, a miracle!—that is to say, a miracle with limitations. Miss Polly interpreted in this wise:

"Of course, it's hardly fair to count Mr. Tracy, because he isn't one bit attractive, and has a look of unhappiness which makes me think he is married and has been for a very, very long time. Anyhow, he is a man! Mr. Ormond is

much better. He is quite handsome—side face—but is too well along in years to be of any great conversational value. But as for the new one—the white-toothed, Grecian-nosed, straight-legged one, with darling little wet curls nestling all over his beautiful head—oh, Lord!"

Obviously, Miss Polly Thurman was impressed.

"And a person," she declared, with rising warmth, "who would think for a quarter of a half a second of leaving a Romeo-Adonis like that right out in the middle of the cold water—"

"S-sh!" cautioned Valda, as the person under adverse criticism came toward them from Mr. Girard's cabin, followed by the unhappily married Tracy.

"Pardon me, Miss Girard," said the gray haired possibility; "but may we have a word with you—my secretary and I—alone?"

Valda rose and answered in polite dignity.

"Yes, Mr. Ormond, you may. There are *several* matters to be discussed—immediately!"

She led the way into the main saloon and waited till the door was closed, while Tracy took the additional precaution of shutting the traps of two portholes which opened on the deck. Valda noted this, but said nothing, though there were lines about her mouth which warned her

guests that the interview might be squally. She did not wait to be placed on the defensive, but opened the battle without delay, seizing on the advantage of attack.

"Now, gentlemen," she began, when all three were seated, "you will pardon me for speaking frankly. The matter is a business one."

There was a slight pause. Tracy was nervous, as proved by his shifting eyes and restless feet; but Ormond seemed perfectly at ease. He was about to speak; but Valda checked him:

"Your manner of coming aboard my father's yacht," said she, "was, to say the least, irregular."

Mr. Ormond smiled in fatherly indulgence.

"You received Mr. Girard's telegrams, did you not?"

"Yes, certainly," she admitted; "but any one could send a telegram."

"Miss Girard!"

There was genuine reproach in the tone; but Valda answered remorselessly:

"The matter, Mr. Ormond, is a business one, admitting of no formality."

"Granted," he returned; "but what, may I ask, leads you to suppose that friends of your father would deliberately break the law in forging messages?"

"Your own recent conduct," she retorted angrily, a red spot flaming in either cheek, while her big brown eyes snapped fire. "I cannot conceive of any friends of my father being willing to desert a helpless and drowning man." Again she checked his protest, and continued hotly, "Your order for full steam ahead was in violation not only of every seaman's code of mercy, but of every human creature of God who calls himself a man!"

She had risen to her feet, feeling that not one moment longer could she look upon this wretch and hold her dignity; but Ormond had risen also, and stepped between her and the door.

"Miss Girard," he said quietly, "in your ignorance of the facts, and your lack of observation, you are perfectly justified in condemning me. Won't you sit down?"

For an instant she held him, eye to eye; but in his glance she found no wavering; then she set her lips and complied with his request. Ormond continued in the same unruffled tone:

"It is not easy for a man to desert a fellow creature in distress, and my seeming inhumanity in the eyes of all your crew is as great a grief to me as the actual deed would seem to you. To you it *was* actual, and I cannot blame you in the least; but when you do understand, I am certain your attitude will undergo a change." He

paused reflectively, and then went on: "There are matters connected with this affair which I much prefer not telling you, and beg earnestly that you let the whole subject rest until we meet Mr. Marcus Girard in New York."

"No!" said Valda, with a snap of her firm white teeth. "I must know your reason now at any cost, or else I will place my own construction on the telegrams received, and act accordingly. Now then, please explain."

Ormond seemed sincerely troubled; for much depended upon his reaching America by the twentieth, and Valda's distrust of him would interfere materially with his plans. He sighed regretfully and turned to her.

"Very well," he answered, "since you insist, I have no choice; yet I warn you in advance that you will regret the pointed question." He paused again, giving her the opportunity for a change of mind; but Valda was silently determined, and her guest resumed: "In my apparent brutality toward—er—Mr. Morson, I was acting, believe me, solely in the interests of your father."

"How so?" she asked, and Ormond cast reserve aside and answered:

"By trying to prevent a possible catastrophe which *you*, if you will pardon me, have unknowingly done all in your power to consummate.

Your mercifully rescued gentleman is, I regret to state, an impostor."

"What!" she exclaimed. "Mr. Morson——"

"His name ain't Morson," interjected Tracy, and, in spite of the fact that Ormond kicked his shins beneath the table, he finished his painfully interrupted statement; "it's Brown."

"How do you know?" asked Valda, looking sharply at both in turn.

"Because," Ormond informed her, "we know him, both of us, by sight and reputation. His name is George C. Brown, a customs house officer in the employ of the British Government."

"But," protested Valda, "your argument is absurd. The man is an American."

"Of course he is," agreed the private secretary, "and just about the smartest one from Canada to Texas. That's why the Britishers pay him a salary. We are Americans ourselves, and know."

This was the longest speech which Tracy had yet made; but, since it contained only common-sense and information, he was permitted to finish.

"And suppose he is an officer," said Valda, still championing her hero, "what of it?" Ormond shrugged. "Have I or my father anything to fear from customs house officials?"

Again Ormond shrugged. "The man was thrown from a tugboat before our very eyes and the least we could do was to stop and save his life."

Ormond smiled broadly.

"My dear young lady, do you suppose for one instant that this whole ridiculous proceeding wasn't merely a cheap trick?"

"A trick?"

"Most certainly! A cheap, theatrical trick, concocted beforehand between your martyred hero and his carefully rehearsed coal heavers." Valda looked incredulous. Ormond dropped sarcasm and returned to common reason. "In this enlightened age, Miss Girard, men do not attempt open murder in the broad of day, especially when an entire yacht's crew are looking on as witnesses."

Valda had not thought of this. She puckered her brow in an effort to find some rational excuse; but Ormond continued to clinch his argument:

"As I said before, you lack observation. Had you followed my suggestion to go straight ahead, you would have seen that tug turn round and rescue Mr. George C. Brown with a boathook. It was childish—absurd! Why, my dear Miss Girard, the fellow can swim like a fish."

“How do you know that?” she asked, catching at womanly straws of hope.

This time Ormond laughed.

“A drowning man doesn’t usually tread water and shoot at tugboats with a big blue gun.”

The girl stared at him. She was forced to admit that the proceeding, viewed from any rational standpoint, was unusual; for the acts of drowning and target practice refused point-blank to associate amicably.

“So you see,” suggested her guest, as gently as he could, “in the very tenderness and sympathy of your own good heart you were blinded by a mere theatrical trick—a trick to get aboard your yacht—and too transparent for a second thought.”

Valda’s big brown eyes stretched to their utmost capacity.

“But why in the name of Heaven,” she demanded, “should he *want* to get aboard my yacht?”

“Ah,” returned her father’s friend, “now you touch upon a delicate issue, in which, believe me, I have done my best to spare you.”

Valda made a gesture of impatience.

“I think we needn’t beat about the bush. I want the truth, and all of it. Go on!”

Ormond hesitated. Tracy gave a gentle tug

at his coat sleeve. "Better tell her, partner—straight."

Ormond still hesitated. Apparently he did not wish to wound the feelings of his hostess; but now there seemed no way out of it. He rose from his chair, paced thoughtfully up and down the saloon, paused, then said to her gently:

"I regret to inform you that your father is in trouble." The daughter started, but took a grip upon herself and waited for the rest. Ormond conveyed the news as tactfully as possible. "To be perfectly candid, Mr. Girard has recently acquired quite a valuable lot of rare gems, which, if I may so put it, he was in the act of transferring to his home in New York, without the—er—without the formalities usually observed in the customs house."

"What!" cried Valda, springing to her feet in fury. "My father a smuggler! A cheat! I don't believe you! It's a——"

"Please, please!" begged Ormond, striving to quell her excitement with a lifted hand. "You insisted upon the truth, and the matter—if you'll pardon me—is a business one. It has happened before, Miss Girard—several times."

She sank into her seat, suddenly. To her throbbing brain came the memory of those other two occasions when her honored parent had forgotten to declare the valuable additions to his

gem collection. Also, in the last few years he had ceased to cross by way of the regular trans-atlantic steamers, but travelled to and fro on the Spitfire, a condition which rendered little matters of forgetfulness far easier to contrive. Again, there was his mysterious business—the queer people who came and went—his recent irascibility—the sending of his yacht to Calais on the flimsy excuse that three amiable ladies jarred upon his nerves—in short, a flawless chain of evidence, with the disgraceful word “Dishonesty” stamped on every link.

Yet Miss Valda Girard was not the woman to stop fighting at the first staggering blow, and as for her dear old dad, smuggler or no smuggler, she would stick to him—metaphorically speaking,—like a sheep-burr.

“Go on,” she requested. “I think your story is perfectly ridiculous; but I will hear it through.”

This was most condescending in the daughter of a gentleman caught red-handed in the act of avoiding lawful duty; but Ormond gallantly waived the inconsistency.

“You see,” he explained, “there was a slight accident to Mr. Girard’s plans, and the authorities began a spirited investigation. As for the details of this accident I cannot and will not speak. Suffice it to say that your father was in

rather a tight place, so he passed the gems to Mr. Tracy and ordered me by wire to come aboard this yacht."

"And father?" the daughter asked. "Where is he?"

"He leaves Liverpool this evening on the Lusitania," replied Ormond, while Tracy once more cut in with another item of wisdom and information, this time a trifle more laconic:

"He gets to New York—is searched—nothing doing!"

This was rather an unpolished remark for a private secretary; but Valda scarcely noticed it in the stress of more serious matters. Besides, Mr. Ormond was speaking again, truthfully beyond a doubt, and most respectfully:

"You will understand, my dear young friend, that your father followed the only course left open to him; and I deeply regret being the unwilling cause of his daughter's mortification."

But the daughter was not in a position to admit mortification, or anything else in fact, until more certain of her ground. This man was perfectly plausible, and was certainly familiar with Mr. Girard's habits and affairs; still there was a possibility of doubt—that bulldog refusal to believe a wrong in those we love, even when confronted with self evident, solidified fact.

"Gentlemen," she said, "just one thing more,

and I hope you will forgive me if my question seems unreasonable. What positive proof can you offer me that this story of yours is true?"

Ormond smiled at her, as one might smile away the vagaries of a little child.

"Why, the best in the world, if you think it necessary." He took from his pocket a leather case, opened it, and strewed its contents on the table. "Look! Here are the gems themselves."

The girl saw before her a dozen or more large pearls, about the same quantity of uncut rubies, and a huge emerald in a heavy, antique setting. She knew enough of jewels to appreciate their value, and her intimacy with her father's collection was proof positive that the emerald alone was worth a small fortune; still, the mere existence of these gems was not sufficient to implicate Marcus Girard in the doubtful transaction.

"Yes," she admitted grudgingly, "these are genuine enough; but—but how am I to know—"

"That they are Mr. Girard's property!" finished her father's friend. "Doubtless you will recognize this."

He handed her the case which had held the gems, a handsome and expensive cigar case of black Morocco, embossed with a large gold monogram and having the name and New York

address of Marcus Girard stamped on its inner edge. Valda herself had presented it to him on his last birthday, and now her castles of hope came tumbling about her head, while she sat in numbed silence, holding the fateful gift in her ice cold hands.

“Are you satisfied, Miss Girard?”

“I—I don’t know,” she faltered. “It all seems plausible enough; but—but, oh, it’s hard to believe that dad would——”

She choked, and the tears of helpless grief came bubbling to her eyes; while Ormond, who had caused her suffering only when forced to clear himself of a weighty charge, seemed to feel that his act was positively criminal. He disliked to say more; still it was a safeguard against future complications, so he raised his eyes and asked gently:

“Do you wish any further proof?”

She was silent for a moment, thinking hard and fast; then suddenly she dashed away her tears and raised her head.

“Yes,” she said, and pointed to the gems, which, one by one, he was putting back into the case. “Give me those things, and I will deliver them to dad in person.”

She held out her hand; but the other hesitated. Tracy sought to interfere with a mild objection.

“The last thing Mr. Girard told me was not

to let anybody but Mr. Ormond touch 'em. Yes'm!"

Valda turned upon him suddenly, causing him to look more unhappy than ever:

"My father can trust his own child, can he not?" She withdrew her eyes from him and placed them on his companion. "I will put those gems in the yacht's safe, where no one can molest them. Isn't that fair?" Ormond still hesitated, and the flush came back into her cheeks. "You will do as I suggest, Mr. Ormond; otherwise I will order Captain Larris to make straight for Liverpool, where I will submit the whole matter to the authorities. This, sir, is final!"

She meant it too, and somehow both men knew she meant it, though the elder seemed not in the least disconcerted by her firm demand. He smiled at her ardor and laid the cigar case obediently on the table.

"Do just as you prefer," he agreed heartily; "only, it is not on my own account I hesitate—but yours."

"Why?"

She was in the very act of reaching for the case; but her hand remained outstretched across the table, as Ormond answered gravely:

"Because Mr. George C. Brown will get that package from you."

Her lips curved in superior scorn, and this time she held her father's property firmly in her grasp.

"Oh, I hardly think so," she answered confidently; and any one seeing her as she drew herself to her splendid height would have agreed that the task was not an easy one.

"I don't mean force," said Ormond, with his easy smile; "but there are other ways—and Brown is not a fool. The fellow is rather a smooth proposition, Miss Girard; but please forgive the timely warning. He is quite a carpet-knight, I understand, his longest suit being that of sympathy." The narrator paused to laugh, as at some humorous recollection. "Why, only last month he worked up quite a famous case simply by appealing to a lady's tenderness of heart. Told her a glittering yarn about having come from a place—I've forgotten the name—down in Egypt, and claimed to be carrying his entire fortune in his belt. He reached London, and was robbed in his hotel by masked burglars. Think of it! Lost everything he had on earth, poor fellow!"

Again Ormond laughed at the artfulness of the wicked Brown, and continued reminiscently:

"Of course the impressionable young lady felt sorry for such a handsome fellow in distress, and grew a mite too confidential—which,

by the way, was just what the fox was after. He systematically wormed her secret out of her, handed her over to the police, and laughed at her youthful indiscretion. I dare say, Miss Girard, he would try the same sort of game on you—that is, if you are foolish enough to give him the opportunity."

At this half implied criticism of her lack of womanly intelligence, Valda grew justly incensed. She tried not to show it; but who can help the sparks from snapping in their eyes; especially when their eyes are big and brown and very beautiful?

"Mr. Ormond," she said, with her hand on the saloon doorknob, "I think I am just foolish enough to let him try it."

And she was.

CHAPTER V

THE IMPUDENCE OF MR. JONAH

DINNER had been announced, but Miss Girard did not respond; instead, she was seated comfortably on deck, in a wind-sheltered nook, a long and becoming ulster, and a much becushioned steamer chair. She was having a headache and a cup of tea.

Miss Polly Thurman was on her way to dinner; for that young person was so constituted that nothing under heaven ever interfered with her vigorous appetite, though, for once, this fortunate state was threatened. She had peeped through the deck porthole of the dining cabin and was astonished to perceive Mr. Ormond, Mr. Tracy, and Aunt Mary eating their soup in silence. She was a little late, owing to a special toilet, and confidently expected to join a party of five instead of three. Where, then, were Miss Girard and the delectable Mr. Jonah?

Now Polly was of a practical turn of mind; so she made a leisurely tour of investigation, embracing the port and starboard sides of the Spit-

fire's decks, coming rather unexpectedly upon the headache and the cup of tea.

"Why, Valda!" she exclaimed. "Aren't you going to have your dinner?"

"No, I think not," returned the invalid weakly. "If I feel better, I may take something later. Now run along, my dear, before the soup is stone cold."

Miss Polly gasped; but ran along as requested. She did not ask for information concerning the missing member of the party, or even mention his aristocratic Virginia name, a fact which showed a most commendable restraint in one so young. However, she paused at the door of the main saloon, glanced back at the steamer chair, and murmured sadly:

"I do believe she's laying in wait to snap him up before anybody else can even get a chance!"

Now, this, in a sense, was literally the case, although it depends somewhat upon the interpretation of the phrase "to snap up." Miss Girard *was* lying in wait, with the premeditated intention of private converse with the attractive Mr. Jonah; yet be it known that her earnest desire held neither selfishness nor overjoy.

Again, there were other reasons why she did not care to dine, reasons strictly disassociated with her doubtful headache. She felt that she simply could not face the two strangers who

shared with her the knowledge of her father's slide from the hill of righteousness. Personally, she was unafraid; but she loved her father, and felt the humiliation keenly. True, smuggling was not, after all, such a heinous sin, for thousands of perfectly respectable people did it—in a small way. But to make a business of it! To systematically defraud two Governments! To cheat and lie and run the hourly risk of open shame! Besides, there was something else behind it. She could see it in the kindly restraint of her father's agents, who had taken such drastic measures to scurry away from justice. They had disregarded the official signals to stop in the port of Calais! They had hinted at a deeper complication than mere smuggling; but refused to reveal its details! What, then, could such a refusal mean?

A thousand direful possibilities came swarming from out the clouds, from out the sea—from the very breeze that whined and whispered in her ears—from the oily churn of the Spitfire's engines which called and called to her in each accusing throb: "We're running away! We're running away! We're running away!" *From what?*

Another thought arose to haunt her. Since taking charge of the gems in her father's cigar case, she was now the custodian of illicit prop-

erty—the receiver of stolen goods; and suddenly she began to experience all the varying sensations of a sensitive conscience harried by the curse of a virgin theft. Of course it was not *her* theft; yet, on the other hand, these gems were now locked in the yacht's safe. She had put them there herself, knowing they were smuggled, knowing she had no honest right to touch them with her unstained hands. Yes, truly, she was party to a crime.

Of course she might even now turn back to England and make a clean breast of it to the authorities; but what of Marcus Girard? What if some deeper crime was connected with the miserable affair, as darkly hinted at by the complacent Mr. Ormond? Could she prove false to her own flesh and blood on mere suspicion? No, she was in for it, and, being in, she would stand up for Marcus Girard till the soles of her fighting shoes were worn to her stocking feet!

With this laudable determination, she felt better; but turn and twist the matter as she would, one hideous, persistent fact remained. In open defiance of international law, she was holding a package of valuable, dutiable goods, and a beautiful devil had come up out of the sea and was after it.

Meanwhile, the "beautiful devil," who had

stirred up this peck of pitch, was arraying himself in the first mate's cabin. It seems strange that a gentleman of apparently amiable disposition could not do even so simple a thing as to dress himself without fermenting additional woe; yet such was the lamentable case.

The first mate, Mr. Beasley, was tall and heavy shouldered; thus, figuratively speaking, affording a fair fit of costume to the castaway; but here his present usefulness ended abruptly. He was a disagreeable man, both as to nature and personal appearance, having large red hands and a pair of red, protruding ears to match. His eyes were keen but unkindly, and the yacht's crew, to a man, disliked him cordially, on account of his habitual harshness exerted in the name of discipline. Valda too shared this general dislike, and, although the mate was ever obsequiously polite to her personally, she had urged her father on several occasions to release him from the Spitfire's service. Had Marcus Girard listened, it might have saved some trouble.

At any rate, the two young men started in on a very friendly footing. Beasley offered the unrestricted freedom of his private and official wardrobe, and the wet one accepted gratefully. They chatted along on a variety of topics as the toilet advanced from towels to collar buttons,

and then Beasley began to ask personal questions. Morson endeavored to answer with tactful evasiveness; till presently, to his mind, the interrogations took the form of a positive impertinence. He looked at the mate squarely for a full five seconds, elevated his brows in polite astonishment, then deliberately turned his back, and adjusted one of Beasley's neckties in frigid silence.

Now the mate had not intended to be boorish. He was simply ignorant; yet somehow, the Southerner's air of refined superiority made Beasley conscious of that yawning chasm which is sometimes given the elusive name of "caste." A yacht's mate was a servant, and a yacht's guest was his social master—even when fished from a common sea without the tag of society's endorsement.

Therefore the mate's red face turned redder still, while his heavy jaw closed with an angry snap and remained in that position. His airy companion offered no further opening for remark of any kind, and the rest of the toilet was made in utter silence—a silence far more expressive than any number of clumsy words—for each, without one tangibly discourteous act, had made an enemy.

If, however, both were offended, from their individual points of view, one of them at least

showed little evidence of grief as he stepped on deck in the glory of his borrowed plumes. He wore a gold braided yachting cap, white shoes and trousers, and a dark blue coat fastened only by the lower buttons on account of his expansive chest. This heightened the effect of his tapering lines, from shoulder to hip, from hip to ankle; and now as he stepped into the moonlight with a careless, catlike swing, a woman would have said of him, "He can dance!" A man would have said, "He can box!"

He may have done both or neither; yet beyond a doubt Bruce Morson of Virginia wore a positive air of cockiness. This was due partly, perhaps, to his gilt buttons; for, strangely, in the weakness of human flesh, a uniform begets a species of overbearing, swaggering superiority, be it worn by a regal grenadier or the little black hallboy in a cheap apartment.

Mr. Morson liked his costume; he liked it vastly; yet, had he been conscious of a pair of big, brown, half-closed eyes which watched him critically from a shadowy angle of the deck, he might have been warned that a certain rooster was in danger of having his comb cut. But, unfortunately, he seemed conscious only of his personal appearance and his mental satisfaction therewith—a condition somewhat difficult to understand in a man who had been literally

thrown upon the world, or, to put it more correctly, the English Channel, with nothing to his back but a tattered shirt and an unusually pleasing breadth of shoulders.

He, too, peeped through a porthole of the dining cabin, whistled softly, then took a short stroll of investigation, coming eventually upon the lady in the steamer chair.

“Good evening!” he greeted cheerfully, as he paused and made her another of his dancing master bows. “Permit me to acknowledge my double debt of gratitude; the first, in a somewhat trifling matter of saving my life; the second, in providing an appreciative wretch with dry clothing.”

“Oh, don’t mention it, please,” she answered, with a studied lack of interest. “Believe me, we would have done the same for any member of your tugboat’s crew.”

This was not particularly flattering; yet the young man, in the vastness of his vanity, seemed pleased to take an optimistic view of it.

“Thank you,” he said, smiling happily; “even a smutty faced coal heaver could scarcely fail to appreciate the luck of being rescued by Miss Girard. May I sit down?”

Valda drew in her breath sharply. She was taken aback by the very brazenness of him; yet she herself had planned the interview, and the

sooner it was over the better for all parties concerned.

"Yes," she answered, pointing to a camp stool, "I want very much to talk with you."

He expressed his gratitude for the honor, drew up a stool beside the rail, seated himself, and carefully adjusted the creases in Mr. Beasley's trousers.

"This is lovely!" he remarked. "Luck seems to be literally *chasing* me."

Valda was not so sure of this; but she was certain of something else. The reckless young gentleman had foolishly selected a spot where the moonlight fell full upon his handsome features; and, while it was most probably done for effect, still it afforded her the very opportunity desired—that of watching the face of Mr. George C. Brown when he tried to worm her secrets out of her.

Her own face was partly in shadow; but Mr. Brown, or Mr. Morson, or Mr. Who-ever-he-really-was, could discern enough of it to claim his entire approval and cause him to feel assured of a most delightful interview. She herself was wondering just how to open the painful subject, when the rescued gentleman spoke suddenly and saved her the trouble.

"Miss Girard," he began, "before we discuss the insignificant subject of my own affairs, I

should like—with your permission—to ask a few simple questions.”

Valda gasped mentally. This was exactly the position which she wished to occupy herself; but, in the very suddenness of it, she murmured a faint assent and endeavored to still the beatings of her heart. His first question hardly tended to that particular state of quietude: “Who, may I ask, are the two gentlemen guests on board your father’s yacht?”

Valda had leaned forward; but she sank back quickly into the shadow. It had come, then! This man was not only an officer of the law, as Mr. Ormond had told her, but started in by scoring a bull’s eye. If she had the remotest idea of keeping Marcus Girard out of the legal toils, now was her time to whirl in, so to speak, and block inquisitiveness. She once more leaned forward into the light and replied with surprising calmness:

“Why, what a peculiar question! Mr. Ormond and Mr. Tracy are friends of my father’s and are travelling with us on a business trip to New York. Why?”

“You surprise me,” he said. “How long have you known them—personally?”

This was a query not to be evaded by anything short of a downright fib, and Valda till now had been of a comparatively truthful dis-



This Man Had Started in by Scoring a Bull's-eye!

position—as truth is handled in enlightened days.

“Well,” she temporized, “it’s rather hard to say, exactly; but I’ve known them for—oh, for ever so long.”

She was doing fairly well, but not quite well enough for a customs house official. He smiled and tried again:

“Miss Girard,” he urged, “this matter, though you may not think it now, is of vast importance to me, and possibly to yourself; and your avoidance of the subject may tend to make it harder for us both. Would you mind being just a little more explicit?”

She sat up very straight and became most explicit indeed; also, her big brown eyes were snapping sparks.

“Yes, Mr. Morson, I will!”

She was facing him now, and, if not actually standing in her fighting shoes, one of them was tapping angrily upon the deck, while her words came coldly, cuttingly:

“I cannot pretend to understand your attitude. A guest by chance, and yet you presume to catechise your involuntary hostess concerning her personal affairs! I repeat it, these gentlemen are my father’s friends! They are also mine! I vouch for them! And therefore, sir, you will please consider the subject closed!”

There was silence for a moment, then the crumpled, conceit-smashed gentleman spoke again, and with humility:

“Miss Girard, in offending you, believe me, I have done so without the faintest phantom of intention. Before this voyage is over I think you will understand. Till then we will call the matter closed. I beg your pardon.”

Once more came a thoughtful silence, in which the man and woman looked out across the moonlit sea, each busied with secret ponderings, each conscious of the fact that sooner or later a battle royal would be declared, each grieving a little that it must be so; then, suddenly, Valda laughed.

“Mr. Morson,” she said, “for two grown people, we are acting very childishly indeed, and are making mountains out of dust heaps; besides, I am simply perishing to hear something of yourself.”

Now this, beyond a doubt, was flattering; it was more. It was unctuous balm to the soul of any man, be he proud or lowly, plain or possessing a Grecian nose and fetchingly curly hair. Therefore the “beautiful devil” girded up his loins, as it were, and swaggered jauntily into the trap.

CHAPTER VI

CUTTING A BOOSTER'S COMB

“MISS GIRARD,” the Southerner presently began, “to make it all perfectly clear to you, I’ll have to go back a little, but will try not to bore you with any unnecessary detail. My mother died when I was quite a shaver, and left the dear old dad and me to work things out together. We did it somehow; but he had to be the mother—and all the rest of it. I reckon it’s rather hard for you to understand the love between a father and his boy; but he and I—well, we were just chums.”

Valda thought she did understand that kind of love, and wished that her own dad were just a little nearer to her in the matter of his confidences; therefore she found herself listening attentively, and with an indescribable envy, to the low, rich voice of the Southerner, with its compellingly quaint accent and its tone of genuine sincerity. “The time came,” he continued, “when I had to go to college. It was a wrench, too, for the dad went out of the country. He was a constructing engineer, Miss Girard,

and took a position with the Uganda Railroad —away off down in Egypt, you know."

Egypt! Valda came out from under his spell with a jump. *Egypt!* It was the very place which Mr. George C. Brown hailed from when he wormed the secrets out of that other confiding young lady. Well, this time he would find a less impressionable listener.

"I scuffled through Yale," went on her companion, "with a smaller desire for a sheepskin than for seeing the dad again; then I went out and joined him, and for three years we plugged away at bridge building and other light exercise for the British Government, but always with the hope of getting back to God's country and the people who were our people, you understand. Then a rather peculiar thing happened, and it made our hope a possibility."

"The jewelry!" thought Valda. "It's coming!" And sure enough it came.

"You see," said Morson, turning his strange gray eyes upon her, "it was this way. We had a smash-up on one of our branch roads, and dad was rather nice to an ugly little brown woman and her kid—funny little monkey!—I got to liking him absurdly before we were through, though the process of cutting teeth is an ordeal, by George!"

The narrator paused to laugh, and Valda

found herself thinking that if this tale had been really true she might have read between the lines and found therein a big and beautiful tenderness which, even against her will, appealed strongly to her own maternal instincts; yet, since he was merely lying, it made her despise him utterly.

“And then,” the handsome hypocrite resumed, “the husband of the little brown woman came—had been away somewhere for a month—and turned up worried. He seemed fearfully cut up, poor fellow! and thanked us—I mean, he thanked dad—till it got to be embarrassing; then he and his wife and little Abdul Ben went away on a camel, but kept looking back at dad as far as we could see them. The husband was an Arab—a Sheik or something—connected in a way with somebody high up—and about a week afterward he sent dad a package all done up in date leaves. It was rather valuable, that package; but of course we couldn’t send it back, because, you know, down there when a gentleman makes you a present and you refuse it—well, the gentleman makes you a personal call and runs a lance through your liver. Funny old custom; but it’s fact! So we accepted the inevitable—and the windfall.”

The listener thought she knew something of the contents of this windfall, but made no com-

ment, and tried also to accept the inevitable in the form of a swiftly moving but ridiculous story.

“This unexpected present,” explained the young gentleman, “made it possible, as I said before, for dad and me to come back home; so we resigned from the company and started. Dad was pretty well run down by the hot climate, and took the fever; so we had to stop in an infernal little mud village on the river. Of course I nursed him as best I could; but—but it was a frightfully hot spell—horrible! no wind—no ice—and—well . . . he died.”

The teller of the tale had paused. Valda saw him bite his lip, and—yes, she was sure of it—tears had come into his eyes, though he turned his head away.

Oh, he was doing well, this splendid humbug, and she watched him with a sort of gloating joy. Now was the time to trip himself, for if only he produced his handkerchief, or even touched his knuckles to his eyes, it would add the one missing theatrical effect; but the man did neither. He kept his head slightly turned, in delicate concealment of his grief, till the sea breeze dried the suspicious moisture. Now, certainly, this man was a most amazing liar—but an artist.

“I beg your pardon,” he said presently, “I

didn't mean to tell it just that way." He paused again and then went on: "Well, there was mighty little pleasure in coming home alone; but of course I—I couldn't stay out there—and why should I? That package I was telling you about contained the equivalent of a good deal more than I ever expected to pile up with a railroad salary, and I was pretty lonesome for home, anyway. But there was another thing. The dear old dad had talked a little about his prospects, and a promiscuous knowledge of the fact wasn't what you might consider healthy; so I tucked the stuff in my belt, slipped quietly off in the late evening, with a wise intention of—"

He had stopped abruptly and was looking at her with an odd expression on his handsome face.

"Well!" she said. "I'm listening. Go on."

"I'm afraid it's hardly necessary," he objected, in mild reproof; "for you don't believe one single thing I'm saying."

"How do you know that?" she asked.

He smiled a little sadly, and leaned back with his hands behind his head.

"Only people who play poker and the big games of life learn to control their features; and you, I am happy to see, are not a gambler. Besides," he added, leaning forward for a bet-

ter view, "those innocently expressive eyes of yours told me lots awhile ago when I asked about your father's friends."

Valda wondered just how much she *had* told on account of her ignorance of poker and other vices, but hastened to shift the conversation to less swampy ground.

"At least," she admitted, referring to his story, "I'm rather interested. Pray go on."

He thought for a moment, smiled to himself, then courteously complied:

"I travelled in a somewhat roundabout way toward England, making no special outcry concerning my gems or my modest presence; and then——"

"Stop!" commanded Valda. "Allow me to finish for you. It is perfectly simple. You reached London! You went to a hotel! In the night your room was entered by masked burglars! They deprived you of your belt! Lost everything you had on earth, poor fellow! Well?"

She had spoken in withering contempt, and the man was staring at her in open-mouthed, magnificently feigned astonishment.

"And how in the name of glory—*did*—you—*know*?"

"I *didn't* know!" she snapped. "I was merely placing these miraculous events in uni-

form and logical sequence. I confess it with shame, but I've read cheap novels before."

This was intended for a facer; but if she expected to abash a customs house official with mere facers, she was very much mistaken, for he smiled and nodded in approval.

"Good!" he applauded. "I'm glad to hear it. However, you have omitted some important detail. Can you tolerate a second chapter?" She did not design to answer, so he took advantage of the proverb and continued: "I awoke to the pungent odor of chloroform, discovered two perfectly logical masks, and did my level best to observe the rule of dramatic action. I landed upon the chin of the first villain—with flattering results—but the second villain inconsiderately smote me with the butt of his ugly weapon, and I spoiled the climax by going peacefully to sleep."

It occurred to Miss Girard that his tone had assumed a decidedly sarcastic tinge, so she took a leaf from his book.

"Indeed!" she scoffed. "And you doubtless wear some ocular proof of this coward's blow?"

"Fortunately, yes," he answered, showing his abominably even teeth and bowing his curly head for inspection. "Kindly oblige and honor me by observing that lump."

"H'm!" she sniffed, in a superior scorn.
"Anybody can get a lump!"

"Yes, certainly," he agreed, his gray eyes crinkling at their corners. "As a rule, I find it comparatively easy; yet, for the sake of argument, let us acknowledge Exhibit A and pass along. When I regained consciousness, my belt—as you rationally surmised—was gone into the night. One burglar, happily, was not. I marked him Exhibit B, and exhibited him to various sympathetic guests who exhibited themselves in blushless disarray. I sent for the police, modestly dismissed the *robes de nuit*, and interviewed the mask alone. It confided in me that its more fortunate brother-mask was even then retreating toward Calais, where it intended meeting still another mask."

This tone of levity, coupled with the cheapest sort of style from the cheapest novels, irritated Valda; and still there was something in the story which caused her to think and think hard. True, the occurrence was just barely possible; yet it held such glaring flaws.

"One moment," she asked. "Do you mean to tell me that this man was willing to betray his friend and give you the information concerning his plans?"

"On the contrary," declared Mr. Morson, gravely, "he was absurdly reticent."

"Then how," she demanded, "did you get it out of him?"

The young man treated her to a grim and reminiscent smile:

"To be honestly accurate, Miss Girard, I choked it out of him."

"Oh!" said Valda. "But how did you know he was telling you the truth?"

"Because," he informed her, with an air of unshakable conviction, "the gentleman was hanging just a little bit too far over the ragged edge of eternity to lie. But to proceed. He confided in me the interesting fact that his friends intended embarking upon a private yacht, which—Why, what's the matter? Ah, pardon me, I thought you said something—a private yacht—name unknown—which would leave Calais at an uncertain hour this afternoon. I trussed up my informant with some heavy twine and a trunk strap—which the hero invariably carries upon his person—urged him to reform, and struck the trail of his confederates."

To Miss Valda Girard this creature's manner was growing more exasperating every minute, and, in her excited state of mind, it seemed at times to border upon an insult—an insult, at least, to her womanly intelligence. She did not stop to consider that she herself was in part to

blame in forcing this attitude by her openly insulting disbelief; but who could listen to this string of absolute absurdities and not be justly furious? Still, she had her dignity to sustain, so she gritted her teeth and determined to hear the rest without a comment.

“You see,” continued the indiscreet one, “my objective point was France; but by an unforeseen accident I missed the boat, and——”

“Wait!” commanded Valda, spurred from her resolve of silence by so palpable a falsehood. “By your own admission, sir, this robbery occurred sometime during the night, and yet you have the face to claim to have missed a boat which you had, at the smallest estimate, eight hours to catch. Ridiculous!”

“Ah,” he answered tragically and without a moment’s hesitation, “now you touch upon an issue baffling even to a literary Mr. Holmes; but here my doubtful lump rises up again.” His hearer sniffed disdainfully; but he paid no heed. “When I left my hotel by the back window, in order, I assure you, to prevent the matter being bungled by the police, my scalp was bleeding badly. I reached the house of a physician, routed him out of bed and arranged with him for several stitches, at four shillings per stitch. In proof whereof, see Jonas Bell, M. D., of

London—an amiable old party, though rather an indifferent seamstress. Shall I go on?"

"Yes, do," she granted, but with a decided sneer. "Indeed, it is very clever."

"Thank you," he said, and smiled. "The rest, I'm afraid, can scarcely be ascribed to cleverness. In the process of being stitched by a sleepy doctor, I became foolishly faint and dizzy; whereupon he laid me out on his office sofa and administered a simple sedative. He then, I presume, went virtuously to sleep. I did, anyway, awaking with a dramatic start at eleven-five. I made the usual comments attendant upon novelistic catastrophes, dashed to the station, caught a train for Dover, and arrived—too late!"

Valda sighed in irritated weariness. This was the weakest yet. It was past belief that any sane man should tell such a pack of nonsense to any sane woman, with the hope of being credited. Certainly, a customs house official should compose a better story, unless, indeed, he took her for a fool; and by the very careless assurance of his tone, she was forced to believe that this was his present posture. Her own position was far from a pleasant one, and she wondered how she could answer him and remain a lady; but he gave her an opening by his next remarks:

"I chartered a tugboat—or, at least, I thought I did—and was on it when you deigned to first observe me. That, I believe, is all. I am open to cross examination. Take the witness."

For a full minute she regarded his finely cut, patrician features through half closed, angry eyes. Of course it was perfectly immaterial to her whether the man was a liar or not; yet, in spite of his strange mixture of art and clumsiness, the fact remained that he knew something; otherwise he would not have taken the trouble to board the yacht. Just how much he did know, was a question; but, for the ultimate safety of Marcus Girard, it devolved upon Marcus Girard's daughter to find out.

"Mr. Morson," she said quietly, "I think I will adopt your suggestion, for there are several points upon which I should like to be enlightened." She reflected a moment, then selected a vital issue: "You claim to have lost some property. Doubtless you can describe to me the precise nature of your loss."

"Naturally," he laughed. "You will find—unless the booty has been previously divided—a half handful of very pleasing pearls, about the same quantity of uncut rubies, and a whaling big emerald in a somewhat peculiar setting. Of course I could be more exact; but if you will

kindly produce these baubles and allow me to mark them Exhibit C——”

“Sir!”

She had started in spite of herself, and a hot flush spread from throat to chin, from chin to her dainty ears. How should this devil know that the gems were in her own possession, as his words implied? Perhaps it was only suspicion of the truth, in which case it was now her part to mislead the official vulture as far as possible with conscience and her own unpractised powers of deceit. His ability to describe the gems was simplicity itself, for his clients surely would have given him a minute description; but how should he surmise that the Messrs. Ormond and Tracy had given them into a lady's keeping?

“Excuse me,” said Morson, referring to her haughty exclamation, “I was merely thinking how our yellow covered novel ought to end. Kindly proceed with the cross examination.”

But for a time she made no further effort to confound him. She was thinking deeply—harder than ever before in her young, clean minded life. It was her father she wished to shield, her father to whom she owed existence—her bread—her every rag of clothing, from the saucy little yachting cap to the strings of her

fighting shoes. At the thought her spirit rose up in arms, and she longed for the power to crush this man before her—to condemn him out of his own false mouth—to degrade him, even as he sought to smirch the name of her dear old father. And now in her brain a subtle plan was born, and at its coming she smiled and grew suddenly very calm.

“Mr. Morson,” she began, by way of leading him gently toward the pitfall she had set for him, “awhile ago you thanked me for saving your life.”

“Yes,” he answered simply, “and I do so again, most heartily. If——”

She checked him with a lifted hand.

“I am led to infer, then, that this life of yours was actually in danger?”

“Imminently!”

The tone was odd, and contained a certain bantering impishness; yet she failed to note it, for now she had risen to her feet, furious from lip to heel.

“Now that,” she declared, “is a positive untruth!”

“How so?” he asked; but without a shadow of contrition, or a fear that she had here entrapped him.

“Because,” she answered, and her quoted words came cold and hard, “a drowning man

doesn't usually tread water and shoot at tug-boats with a big blue gun."

The Southerner tilted back his head and laughed—a deep, rich laugh, filled to the very brim with keen enjoyment.

"Did you notice that?" he asked. "Awfully funny, wasn't it? You see," he explained, "that part was entirely impromptu. I wanted to get even with my smutty faced coal heaving friends for the realistic way in which they handled me, and, judging from their undignified manner of leaving the deck, I dare say they took the matter seriously."

Again he laughed. To him the proceeding seemed intensely humorous; but Valda Girard was in no frame of mind for humor.

"You admit, then," she demanded, "that the whole affair was nothing but a trick to get aboard my yacht?"

"I do," he acknowledged cheerfully; "but there were several extenuating circumstances. If my dirty little tug had presumed to hail your nice, clean yacht, it was fifty to one that your nice, clean yacht would have turned up her nice, clean nose and tripped merrily upon her way. You see," he added, "it was a groundhog case, and therefore I took the chance of there being at least one person on board with a spark of humanity in her soul, and"—he bowed to her in

gracious gallantry—"my surmise was happily justified."

Valda hesitated, even in her wrath. The man was an enigma. He baffled and troubled her. He had not denied one single accusation made against him, but acknowledged, with a sort of impish joy, his artifice in gaining foot room on the Spittfire's decks. On the other hand, his story was utterly absurd, while his method of telling it only cheapened its effect. He mixed his truth and fiction with a heedless spoon, then offered her the frothy scum to swallow or not at her own discretion. This last point troubled Valda more than all the rest, for she simply could not understand; so she sighed in sheer perplexity and turned to him with a meagre hope of explanation.

"Can you tell me," she asked, "just why you adopted that flippant and exaggerated way of telling me your story—that is, if you wanted to be believed?"

"I can," he answered frankly, and now there was no suggestion of levity in his tone; instead, there came upon his fine young features a look of seriousness that caused her to wonder at him even more. Also, he looked her squarely in the eyes:

"When first I began my story, you listened with consideration; but soon I saw that you dis-

believed, even when I told you of my father who is dead—my friend of friends—whose love meant more to me than a *million* emeralds."

He paused and turned away his head, gazing in silence out to sea, and when he spoke again, his tone was tender and scarcely audible to her who listened with a chill of shame:

"A true man's memory of his parents is a holy thing . . . and you hurt that memory—even though you are possibly not to blame." He faced her once more and squared his shoulders, as if shaking off a passing pang, and his tone again was marked with a dash of carelessness. "After that I didn't care one pinch of wind whether you believed the rest or not. You wanted flippancy—and you got it—with the measure brimming over too! As for who or what I am, I haven't about me a scrap of evidence to prove identity, and you probably wouldn't accept it if I had. No, there is nothing I can offer you beyond the unsupported word of Bruce Morson—vagrant—pauper—by a train of circumstance too absurd for intelligent respect. This, Miss Girard, is all."

He rose from his seat; but Valda stopped him with a look. Surely this was not acting. It was too real; and yet this very reality was part of the man's seductive art. One slip, one weakness, might mean her father's downfall, while

this plausible fox would add another official feather to his cap and laugh at another woman's bald credulity. Still, if in shielding her father's name she wounded a fellow creature to the quick, it would hurt—and the memory of her own lost parent—her mother—was a holy thing. No, cost what it might, she would give the man one final chance.

“Mr. Morson,” she asked, “is Morson actually your name?”

“Yes, certainly,” he answered, with a smile. “What else?”

She did not tell him what was in her mind; but put another question:

“Do you give me your word that you have told me all the truth?—concealing nothing?—on your honor as a Southern gentleman?”

“Why, yes,” he answered simply, “if that will make a difference in your trust—on my honor as a Southern gentleman!”

And here was a paradox—feminine, but still a paradox. The woman believed. At the self-same time she doubted; but the woman, in her heart, believed.

“Thank you,” she said, and smiled upon him kindly. “We will talk it over again to-morrow; but now you had better go. You will dine this evening with Captain Larris—afterward with us.”

The Southerner inclined his head, in acknowledgment both of his dismissal and her trust.

"Good-night," he murmured. "Till to-morrow—*au revoir!*"

He lingered for just an instant, then moved away with the grace and dignity of a Persian cat. Valda's lips tightened. She flung up her chin and called suddenly:

"Mr. Brown!"

He paused, and turned in polite interrogation.

"Yes?"

She took a step to meet him, her white fists clenched, her big brown eyes ablaze.

"Aha!" she cried, and pointed an accusing finger. "*So your name is Brown!*"

This time the young man flushed, and to the very roots of his curly hair. Heretofore his tongue had been glib enough; but now he stammered guiltily in reply:

"I—I beg your pardon, but I had forgotten that. When I came up from Egypt I took the name of Brown in order to——"

"Stop!" she commanded. "Not another word!"

So that was what honor meant to him! The sacred word of a Southern gentleman, forsooth! The oath which men of Dixie held as holy as a mother's memory! Ah, but she had trapped him, and by a woman's wit which was sharper

then than his own! If his very name was false, then so was all the rest of it—every disgraceful bit—and Valda did not spare him with her lash of scorn.

“Oh,” she cried, “you should be ashamed! Ashamed! You asked me to believe, and from first to last you fed me with your oily tongued deceit! And why? Because you dare to think that I—the daughter of Marcus Girard—am the keeper of stolen goods!”

Now this was scarcely logical. She did not pause to consider that by her present attitude; yea, by her very trickery of speech, she was guilty herself of an oily tongued deceit. Indeed, an angry woman seldom stops to consider anything beneath the stars; so Valda swept on in majestic fury.

“And to think,” she stormed, “that you, in your foppish vanity, should dream of befooling *me!* Of swaying my brains—my very pity—with your clumsy lies! Lies! Lies!—for which you receive a salary! A salary for hounding weak women down and worming their secrets out of them! Oh, it’s clever, no doubt, and vastly pleasing to your little soul; but for once, Mr. George C. Brown, you’ve failed! Now go! No, wait!”

Of a sudden her anger seemed to slide away, and in its place crept a calm of cruel irony; for

she knew of a way to hurt him as no other wound could sting. That wise old Cæsar, in his civil wars, had ordered javelins to be cast at the handsome faces of certain self satisfied Roman youths; but Miss Valda Girard would go the ancient warrior several better, and rap Mr. George C. Brown on the very shinbone of his pride and vanity. She regarded him critically from top to toe, and smiled.

“Mr. Brown,” she said, “after all, I’m afraid your present costume hardly suits you. Tomorrow we will make a change.” She paused; but added, presently, with a certain vicious quietness of tone: “At our charming initial interview, you expressed a willingness to work your passage; and in the absence of my father I am master of this yacht. You will report, sir, to Captain Larris—at once—for duty!”

She turned upon her heel and leaned carelessly against the rail, though, to tell the human truth, she watched him from the corners of her big brown eyes. He was vastly handsome, standing straight and tall in the moonlight on the Spitfire’s deck; but to Valda it seemed that she hated him as she hated no other living creature in the world.

He did not try to answer. He simply bowed. Bowed to the inevitable—and to her. In it, as

in that other bow, there was princely deference; yet, also, there was something else—a helpless pride that cannot, in its chivalry, return a woman's blow—a something wonderful and vague, impossible to convey in speech.

CHAPTER VII

THE POWER OF REASON

DINNER on the Spitfire that evening was not, in its strictest sense, a success. True, the dishes served by Miggs, a tall, lank, ministerial steward, were quite beyond reproach; yet it takes far more than successful dishes to make a successful dinner.

Miss Polly Thurman was distinctly disappointed. She had donned her most fetching frock—not with any particular design, of course, but, if appreciative people are not present to observe one in her fetching frocks, then what in the name of Heaven is the *use* of one's fetching frocks? Besides, Miss Polly possessed imagination, and the bare thought of Valda and the beautiful castaway communing, *en tête-à-tête*, on a moonlit deck completely destroyed the flavor of her soup—which, by the way, was a trifle cold when she got it.

The placid Miss Howard was still placid, but uncomfortable. She did not approve of the Messrs. Ormond and Tracy, who, as to number,

made the dinner party complete. To be sure, there was nothing wrong with Mr. Ormond, for he was courteous, refined, and entertaining—in a way—but that any one of a delicate temperament could engage Mr. Tracy as a private secretary, was beyond Aunt Mary's ideal of the eternal fitness of things. Naturally, her nature was too highly cultured to admit of any outward and visible sign of personal disfavor, and, though she had never once in her dear old life played poker, still she controlled her features admirably.

Tracy desired to shine conversationally; and, in spite of Ormond's busy foot, and Ormond's sharp elbow pressed meaningly into his ribs, the secretary achieved a few disjointed observations which threatened Aunt Mary's placid pose of gambler.

Ormond, however, rose to the occasion, and literally talked Tracy down. He talked well, too, of travel, literature, and everyday affairs; but not once of himself, till even Aunt Mary was forced to confess—in spite of his employé—that Mr. Ormond was a gentleman of parts.

Miss Polly listened also; that is, she listened with one ear. The other was trained upon a porthole just opposite her seat—a porthole designed by some hateful, half-witted boat builder who had placed it too absurdly high up

for the convenience of a diminutive (not an inquisitive) young lady.

Therefore the dinner dragged on and on, till Miss Polly divined—unjustly—that Valda had given special orders of retardment to the already snail-like Miggs. But coffee arrived at last, and was consumed, but without the leisurely lazy art of sipping. Then every one sighed in secret relief and went on deck, where they discovered Miss Girard with an empty tea-cup, and, to all appearances, fast asleep.

But Miss Girard was not asleep. To be exact, she was “playing possum,” an accepted form of mild deceit not heinous enough to assign the soul of any one to a place among the goats. She was still thinking, and thinking hard, wondering how she could possibly break the news of the castaway’s degradation. It was not an easy task; for she saw clearly that she must give various versions to various parties, in accordance with their varied ignorance or knowledge of various facts, and most certainly this hitherto upright young lady was being pushed headlong into the pit.

Later, she confided to Polly and Aunt Mary that Mr. Bruce Morson, owing to the shock of nearly being drowned, was just a little unstrung, and would rest quietly till morning.

This was doubtful. In his present state of

mind, Mr. Bruce Morson would *not* rest quietly till morning, though Valda's personal criticism of his morals might prove a cause sufficient to unstring him. However, an over-exactness is sometimes tedious.

To the Messrs. Ormond and Tracy she took occasion to whisper that the man, beyond a doubt, was George C. Brown, and by his manner showed suspicion of the presence of dutiable goods on board the Spitfire. Also, as first suggested, he was willing to work his passage, which, in view of the fact that the ordinary seamen were never allowed to approach that part of the yacht containing the iron safe, she thought wisdom to permit. In conclusion, she apologized to Ormond for her doubts of him; but that gentleman understood perfectly and begged that she banish the trifling matter from her mind.

To Captain Joe she spoke with the authority of one who rules as master of a craft:

“Keep your eye on that Morson man; otherwise he will stir up mutiny!”

Of Miggs, the ministerial steward, she asked with studied carelessness:

“Miggs, did the gentleman eat his dinner?”

Thus it may be seen, in point of innocent deception, that Valda's slide from grace was being conducted in a kind of moral toboggan; but then,

of course, she was thinking only of the interests of her father. She must fight, and fight unselfishly. Duty came first—first always—with Truth and Justice fluttering on behind.

Ormond and his secretary mercifully retired early, leaving the three ladies to chat among themselves on deck. Miss Polly and Aunt Mary did the chatting, while Valda filled the rôle of listener with indifferent results. She was still thinking, so hard in fact as to give a real foundation to her headache claim and thereby spare one frazzled thread of conscience. But she did not wish to talk; she wanted to use her brain in reasoning out the tangled snarl of happenings—and she did.

It is curious how the human mind may be led to condemn perfectly innocent people merely by a logical train of personal prejudice. Valda tried it on several individuals, and in every case it worked beautifully.

If, she reasoned, the story of Mr. Morson was true—which was absolutely preposterous on the very face of it—then the Messrs. Ormond and Tracy were the biggest villains on the top of the earth. They had followed that young man all the way from Egypt, or else had been apprised of his coming through their secret agents. They had marked his arrival and tracked him to his hotel. By bribing the servants they had ascer-

tained the number of his room. They had climbed up by a ladder or a fire escape and entered this room, attacking their handsome victim, unfairly, while he slept. Of course he had fought with them—who wouldn’t? And it was very clever of him to have disabled one of them as he did. But the other one had brutally struck him upon his poor head with a hard pistol, deprived his unconscious body of his belt, and escaped into the night. The rest was child’s play. The villain had crossed the channel and conferred with a confederate. They were too familiar with their wicked business to attempt a flight to America on a regular ocean liner, for the wireless system of telegraphy would surely balk their bold designs. No, they had been too smart for that. They had wired to Mr. Girard and arranged to cross on a private yacht. This yacht, on nearing New York, would cruise off Sandy Hook, and Mr. Ormond and his burglarious secretary might land on the Jersey coast at night, then reach Manhattan without detection and dispose of the stolen gems at leisure.

Now, this was logic. It was more. It was woman’s logic, which is said—by women—to be the very best logic in the world. But hold on! This implicated Valda’s father, making him an accessory to crime; and that was, of course, ridiculous! Had it been any one else’s father,

the line of reasoning would be perfectly rational; but, being Valda's father, the whole thing resolved itself into about the most illogical and absurd nonsense to be imagined! No, she must begin all over again—and she did.

The two villains, then, had done everything she said they did; but without her father. They had signed his name to those telegrams, exactly as she had divined from the first. A woman's intuition is a thousand times better than reason, anyway. They had signed his name to the telegrams. They had in some way—it didn't make much difference how—discovered the Spitfire's private cipher code. They had used it as a blind. They had—Oh, wait! That one telegram, in answer to her own, saying, "*Don't be an idiot. Do as I tell you*"—that was just a wee bit too intimate for forgery. It was not only a signature—it was fact! Nasty, incontestable fact!

It implicated the old gentleman again; but surely there ought to be lots of ways to get *him* out of it. It was illogical ever to have put him in. Ah, she had it! How simple! Her father didn't know about the robbery. He thought it was just plain, ordinary smuggling. She would admit smuggling, because she had known him to do it twice; but robbing a poor fellow of his belt—preposterous! These two men had deceived

him! Lied to him! And speaking of liars, Mr. George C. Brown—to revel in slang for once—not only took the cake, but ate it, every crumb! That man's sense of honor was about the lowest, most contemptible thing she had ever dreamed of. To think of him spending his entire young life in deceiving simple-hearted women who hadn't done a single thing but try to economize and save a little duty on their own property! She could understand perfectly how such frivolous, weak minded creatures might be taken in by him, because he *was* handsome, even if he did laugh at them afterward—which, by the by, was a most ungentlemanly thing to do.

No, there hadn't been any crime at all! That was the way of it! This liar had manufactured the whole thing! When she thought of his bare faced impudence, her cheeks burned with shame and rage. When she thought how he had wilfully cast suspicion on her father's friends—these two respectable and almost entirely honest gentlemen—she longed to box his ears, hard. As for his disreputable profession of worming secrets out of people—well, it was simply unbearable! Sympathy was his long suit, was it? He had expected to win *her* over with his crocodile tears and his dancing-master bowings and scrapings. Well, thank goodness there was *some* intelligence left in the world, after all!

Valda sighed. Yes, it was the only solution, pitiful but true. The man was a professional scamp—deceiving people for a salary. But oh, how could he! Think of his mother! No, his mother was dead. She *wasn't!* That was a lie, too! Everything he *said* was a lie! He was nothing but a heartless, conceited, vain beast! But if only he hadn't bowed like that! And if only his hair didn't curl up, as it certainly did, all over his perfectly shaped head! It wasn't fair for a man's hair to curl by itself, anyway, when a poor woman had to spend hours and hours and hours with hot tongs and a temper, or else do it up in papers which make you look a perfect fright and are so abominably lumpy to sleep in. And concerning lumps, how *did* Mr. Morson get *his* lump to which he had referred so humorously as Exhibit A? She herself had noticed one of the tugboatmen with a coal shovel in his hands. This might certainly be a logical origin of the contusion, and—But no! Mr. Morson's lump has stitches in it—stitches which must have hurt him frightfully. No wonder he had become faint and dizzy, poor fellow! Anybody but a very brave person would have screamed.

Valda started, her keen powers of perception receiving a shock. The weakest and most improbable part of Mr. Morson's story had em-

braced the crazy incidents immediately attendant upon that lump; yet now, in the cold, calm light of reason, it became the very strongest part of the story—strongest because of its simplicity of fact. Given a head hit hard enough, and that head would bleed. Results, perfectly natural: Wound—doctor—stitches—pain—dizziness—intelligence on part of trained physician—sedative—relief—sleep! And there you are!

It was all so clear now! Mr. Morson had told the truth. There *had* been a robbery! Mr. Ormond and Mr. Tracy were unmitigated scoundrels! And her own father—No, that wouldn't do at all! Wait! There had been a robbery, but not from Mr. Morson. It was from somebody else! Ah, that was the way of it—at last! What a glorious thing was the power of reason! It was just like flying! She could see the whole simple thing, as in a glass. Mr. Brown *was* Mr. Brown; but what of that? He was merely following out his splendid principles of duty in tracking down Ormond, Tracy, and Gir—Why, oh, *why* should this stupid, idiotic logic persist in singling out her dear old innocent father, while every one else—no matter how clearly culpable—was left scot-free? It was so unreasonable—and mean!

Anyway, she didn't care! Mr. Marcus Girard had nothing to do with it, whatever, and she

defied the whole conspiring world to stand up and prove one single thing by silly, disgusting circumstantial evidence!

But one thing was certain. Mr. George C. Brown was solely and directly responsible for the whole business, and deserved to wear the unbecoming costume of a common seaman and scrub decks for the balance of his despicable life.

At this juncture, Miss Valda, having settled the question finally, turned her fair young back upon the powers of reason and gazed dreamily out to sea. There was a hole in the moonlight, and she looked right through it, away into the far off land of Egypt. She had been there once herself; so the process was easy, and far more pleasant than racking one's brains with mad deductions. Egypt, too, was a restful sort of place—if one chose to take life easy—so she did not trouble herself to hunt up pyramids and camels and Bedouins and things. No, she was watching the building of an iron road.

Now on this iron road there were lots of people—lazy, good-for-nothing people who had to be cursed and driven to their work. And a brown young man was doing it—a very brown young man, but with a streak of white just under his hat brim. And beside him stood another man, a beautiful man—just exactly like

the other one, only he was thinner and older, and his hair was gray. And the two men worked with their arms round each other's shoulders.

This was probably an unorthodox method of railroad construction; but then, you know, Egypt is a strange country, and maybe things are done differently down there.

Then there was a different scene, and it was in a house—a very different sort of house, for there weren't any walls to it, only poles so that the breezes might come in, and there was matting on the floor, and queer looking water jugs hung up by strings. And there was a woman in that house—a foreign woman, because she wore bangles that clinked when her brown hands wandered feverishly—and the older of the men was rather nice to her. The younger man was there too. He walked softly up and down, up and down, and carried a little brown baby in his arms. It was a funny little baby, so foreign and cute, with deliciously comic little features that became all wrinkly when it howled. And the young man jounced it up and down and sang silly, tender things to it. So Valda, somehow, grew intensely interested—in the baby. As for the two men, that was a matter of perfect indifference to her—perfect! And then a Sheik or something came along and told them he was

very much obliged to them, and that they must either accept a large fortune or have a lance run through their livers. And then—

“Valda,” said Aunt Mary, “Mr. Tracy, I regret to state, is a very vulgar person.”

“Is he?” asked Valda absently, and Aunt Mary seemed surprised.

“Yes,” she reiterated, “he is! Also—though I hesitate in criticising any friends of my brother Marcus—this Tracy person can, by no stretch of the imagination, be characterized by the ultra-comprehensive name of gentleman.”

“How do you mean?” asked Valda, dragging herself all the way back from Egypt for the sake of politeness; and Aunt Mary proceeded to explain:

“Because,” averred the placid one, in placidly regretful tones, “he displays it in little things. Do you know, my dear, he actually tucks the corner of his napkin in his shirt collar! Think of it! Besides—when partaking of his food—he snorts. Disgusting!”

The dignified champion of good breeding paused for an adequate expression of disapproval, failed to find it, and resumed:

“I suspected this lack of cultivation upon first observing the character of his neckwear, and proved it later by a few of his conversational re-

marks. For example, while discussing literature with Mr. Ormond, I asked, at random, if he was familiar with Keats. Mr. Ormond made quite an appropriate quotation which proved his taste; but that Tracy person spoke up with an affirmation which, to me, I confess, is utterly incomprehensible."

"What did he say?" asked Polly. "I heard it at the time, but—but I wasn't listening."

"He said," replied Aunt Mary, while a puzzled expression ridged her placid brow, "he said, 'No, ma'am, we don't know Keats personally, as you might say, but we saw him once in a six-round go with Patsy McCue of Brooklyn.'"

Valda wanted to laugh. She wanted to do so very much indeed; yet, being more refined than the Tracy person, she choked and said nothing. Aunt Mary went on, as placidly as before:

"I have been wondering ever since what the creature possibly could mean; and Mr. Ormond also was astonished, if not mortified, for I distinctly detected him in the act of kicking Mr. Tracy—beneath the table—on one of his limbs."

Valda ate a chocolate from a box which lay in her lap, but offered no solution of the problem; then, while Polly and Aunt Mary discussed it in

all its lights, she turned to the hole in the moon-light and hurried back to Egypt, without even checking her trunks.

This time she hunted for the two men, brazenly, and found them in rather an odd place. It was a sort of hut place—on a river bank—and it was hot and close. One of the brown men lay in a bunk, though he wasn't brown any longer, but white—and very still—and the other man sat beside him and held his hand. It was in the night time too; but not the night time either, exactly, but very early in the morning, for the desert was gray, and a hot red smudge was burning in the east. And smells came up from the river and made one long to run away; but the brown man stayed and held his father's hand. It was a frightfully hot spell—horrible!—and there was no wind, no ice, and another red day was coming fast. Then the brown man stooped and kissed the other, gently, on the mouth; and Valda knew—although she couldn't, couldn't look—that a man was dead. But the brown one sat there—sat till the morning came,—and his face was pale and drawn and grim. And so—

“Valda,” said Miss Polly, with startling suddenness, “did you notice how his hair curls up over his left ear?”

“Who?” asked Valda, sharply, rather im-

politely; and Polly answered with a pardonable dash of sarcastic scorn:

“Why, Captain Joe, of course! Who did you think I meant?”

Now, whatever were really Valda’s thoughts concerning the owner of the ear and hair, her reply was quite as remarkable as the Tracy person’s comment on the poet Keats. Verbally, it was nothing. Dramatically, it was much. She sprang from her seat, cast the box of chocolates to an unappreciative sea, went hurriedly to her stateroom and banged the door. (Next morning the carpenter came up and mended it.)

“Goodness!” exclaimed Aunt Mary. “Goodness me! Polly, my dear, I verily believe that child is about to become a sufferer from *mal de mer*.”

But Valda was not seasick. She was just plain heartsick—which is worse, for there is nothing to take for it; but Valda tried. Unlike the knights of old who always buckled up for a doughty deed—she unbuckled. That is to say she unhooked, unlaced, untied, undid; but mainly, like millions of her sister sufferers, Miss Valda Girard unpinned. Then, when lightly garbed and ready for the fray, she prepared to make her beautiful face unbeautiful by a long and lovely, delicious cry.

She did it for twenty-seven minutes, without

the inconvenience of "sob-restrictors"—meaning thereby, corsets. Then she sat up and observed results in a mirror. They were not flattering. She told herself that she was simply, absolutely hideous—which, by the way, was the biggest fib she had told yet, and she knew it. Still, she had looked much better twenty-seven minutes before; so now she proceeded to obliterate the wreck of woe by the application of cold cream and nine other unctuous articles, rubbed on and in and over and off by patient, intricate art, the while she criticised creation, generally and adversely.

"And to think," she muttered, among other things, "of Polly Thurman being such a shameless, silly little *fool* as to notice whether a man's hair *curls up* over one ear or not!"

It was simply, perfectly, positively ridiculous!

"And besides," she told her pathetic, grease-streaked image in the glass, "his hair *curls up* just exactly the same over *both* ears!"

CHAPTER VIII

AUNT MARY'S MUTINY

NEXT morning—for two distinct reasons—Miss Girard got up very early. In the first place, she had not slept a wink; in the second, she wanted to observe for herself how Mr. Morson-Brown looked in the degrading costume of a common seaman.

As for the cause of this condition, she had reasoned the whole thing out after she went to bed. She reasoned it out in nineteen entirely new ways; but invariably poor old Marcus Girard bobbed up and butted into trouble, so to speak. Therefore his daughter reasoned herself into a state of mental hysteria, then finally hit upon the sensible and correct solution.

In Wall Street, she had heard, there was one infallible method employed in the purchase or sale of stocks and things, and it was this: To figure out in one's own mind the most probable and natural turn of the market—to figure it out carefully, till not a single, solitary doubt remained—and then do just the opposite.

Valda applied this splendid principle to the case of her respected parent, and, figuratively speaking, put the dear old gentleman in jail on six separate and villainous charges—all of which conclusively proved his spotless innocence.

Perhaps this was logically wrong; but if there be any to condemn our young lady's line of argument, pray let them remember that among the legal records of our free and glorious land Miss Valda Girard is supported by 37,981 tragic instances where judicial guns have gone off half-cock and peppered the wrong man.

Valda did not know this. It was merely feminine intuition; but, equipped as she was with this rare power of divination, she might have sat with honor on a legal bench, or even have lasted a few days in Wall Street.

At any rate, in exonerating Marcus Girard, she was forced to let Ormond and Tracy out also; but this, of course, could not be helped. One earnest duty remained, that of fixing the responsibility; and the simple process of elimination fitted a black-and-white striped suit to the athletic figure of Mr. Morson-Brown. The fact that circumstances also pointed strongly to his guilt caused friction with her Wall Street scheme of reasoning; yet, on the other hand, it evened up certain other circumstances in con-

nection with her father's conduct which were hard to swallow. Thus justice was done to all four implicated parties.

Be that as it may, the self appointed judge had arrived upon one firm decision. Whether Morson was Brown or Brown was Morson, he had perjured himself on the honor of a Southern gentleman, and, with either name, he was a reprobate. Therefore she swore an oath herself, on the honor of a Northern lady, that no matter what might happen—no matter if he proved himself to be a glittering angel on a special visit from the Farther Shore—he should work his passage to the end of that hateful voyage!

So she got up early to see him start in. It would be rather humorous, too, to watch this swollen aristocrat slinking about the deck with his hat brim tilted forward to hide the shame in his eyes. Yes, it made her laugh even to think about it; and for the first time there seemed to arise prospects of a very agreeable voyage indeed.

But if her joy consisted in the hope of finding him in a state of mournfully collapsed pride, she was destined to disappointment. True, his sailor hat was tilted, but not over his shamed eyes. It was tilted—rakishly—over one unshamed ear. Also he did wear the degrading costume of a common seaman; but Valda was

forced to admit—even against the powerful argument of a woman's rage—that he was just about the best looking thing which it had ever been her misfortune to set eyes upon. This was humiliating!

The suit, like the other seamen's suits, was of white duck, trimmed with a narrow cording of pale blue. The blouse was loosely cut, with a wide collar which ran into a deep V, thus giving a glimpse of his strong brown throat above the plastron which bore a miniature of the Spitfire's pennant in embroidered silk. The trousers were snugly fitting about the hips—snug to the knee—then flared away in conventional sailor style to his canvas shoes.

Mr. Morson-Brown not only looked well in it, he looked splendidly in it, and seemed vastly conscious of the fact. More irritating still, he was polishing a brass rail with a dirty rag, and, to all outward appearances, took an actual pride in the degrading work. It was positively maddening!

The mistress of the Spitfire passed him with her nose in the air; that is to say, she almost passed him, for he tossed his polishing rag aside and called her name. Even then she did not intend stopping, but was so taken aback by his cool effrontery that she did his bidding before she had time to think.

“Miss Girard,” he said, “I want a word with you.”

This was more in the nature of an order than a polite request; but Valda’s stare of icy reproof seemed not to disconcert him in the least, for he smiled and went straight on:

“I’ve been thinking matters over—I mean, from your point of view—and wish to say that you are entirely right in everything you’ve done.”

Valda stared at him again, this time in sheer amazement. Was the man losing *all* his pride? Did he now intend to grovel before her and whine out palliations for his infamy? Would he drop his reckless pose and appeal for pity at her generous hands? But no, he scarcely had that bearing.

“You see,” he explained, “when things happen to our own selves—even unusual things—we never stop to think how improbable they might seem to other people. So I figured it out last evening in a purely unbiassed light, and received a jolt. It’s this. If anybody had come to me and told me the yarn which I told you, I would say he was about the biggest liar that ever went unhung. That’s all, Miss Girard. Thank you very much.”

He touched his sailor hat and turned to his work on the rail, breathing upon it from time to



He Took an Actual Pride in the Degrading Work

time, and rubbing till it fairly glittered in the rays of the morning sun. And Valda stood there and hated him. She wanted to tell him what she thought of him; but somehow she could not find the correctly discriminating phraseology. Suddenly he turned to her again:

“Oh! I almost forgot. With your permission, I should like to ask a question—not about your father’s friends, but about myself.” She did not give permission; but he took it, as seemed to be his customary method of impertinence: “Last night, when you were roasting me, you said something about my receiving a salary for deceiving people.” He paused an instant, while the old look of impishness crept back into his eyes. “Now I wonder if you think I’m a customs house official.”

“No,” said Valda, with a lofty air, “I don’t think it. *I know it!*”

This time she did leave him—left him for good and all—and moved away with dignity and grace; while the man, thus crushed, went back to his work, though, strangely, his big, broad shoulders shook as he bent to his degrading labors.

Valda left the deck and ordered breakfast. It was early, so she had it alone; and, in her opinion, it was about the very worst breakfast ever served by the ministerial Miggs. It was

Morson-Brown's fault, of course. He ruined everything. His baleful influence even permeated the shells of eggs. It muddied the coffee. It made the toast a sort of irritating brown—just like his horrid, disgusting name!

She saw clearly that this fox had tried to deceive her a second time, and she was justly angry. He had meekly admitted the justice of her treatment of him—that his story was impossible and false—then cunningly dropped a hint that the tale might not sound plausible to her, merely because it had not happened to her, personally. In other words, he had presented an honest apple of confession—and put a worm in it. Oh, but that was sly!—satanically sly!—and any one but a wise and far-seeing person might easily have been taken in. And then his master-stroke of vulpine knavery in asking her if she *thought* he was a customs house official! To tell the truth—the blaring, naked truth—then hold it up to artful ridicule! No wonder the British Government was willing to pay this fiend an enormous salary! His resources of deception were illimitable. She could understand that wound on his scalp now—perfectly. He had bumped his head on purpose—just for local color!

The unhappy young lady went on deck again and sat down, but in a location far removed

from the irritating rail polisher; and there she waited with all her remaining patience for the coming of Polly and Aunt Mary. Both these care-free ladies rose at leisure, dressed at leisure, and enjoyed their breakfasts at still more leisure; then they came out joyously and hunted up the mistress of the Spitfire, finding her in a mental condition only to be described by the word "grim." Valda had a disagreeable duty to perform; so she went about it at once and without prelude:

"Aunt Mary," she began, "and you too, Polly, a very sad and distressing thing has occurred on board our yacht."

"Good gracious me!" exclaimed Aunt Mary. "Has he taken cold?"

"No," said Valda, with a vindictive snap of her sharp, white teeth, "unfortunately he has *not!* It is something worse than colds, Aunt Mary. That man is a barefaced, shameless swindler!"

Her two listeners stared at her in speechless incredulity; but Valda did not give them time for disconcerting questions. Such things are always dangerous.

"Last evening," she continued, "I purposely made no mention of it for fear of upsetting you; and even this morning I can give you little detail, as the matter is connected with father's

private business. But this I can say; Mr.—er—Mr. Morson was not thrown from that tugboat, but arranged the whole thing himself in order to get aboard this yacht, with the sole intention of injuring my father. His statements to us were false, by his own admission, and while he may not have done anything to place him actually behind the bars, still, he has no principle, and is *utterly* unscrupulous. He is not a fit person with whom any of us can afford to associate, and I have placed him where he belongs—to work his passage, giving positive instructions that none of this yacht's company shall hold any communication with him whatever. Now, *please*—the matter is closed!"

But the matter was not closed. Both ladies held set and individual views on the subject, nor did they hesitate to state them. With Polly it was thus: Given a young man of uncommon personal promise, on the highroad to perdition, it clearly became the duty of society to check his downward plunge. If society failed to appreciate its opportunity, then it was incumbent upon some philanthropical young person of the weaker sex to roll up her sleeves and reform him. Marriage, she had heard, was a most efficient evil-checker, and, if applied conscientiously before all moral tissue had been completely eaten away—

“Polly,” said Miss Girard, with the utmost severity, “I forbid you to speak one single word on any subject to Mr. Morson. This is final! I am the master of this yacht, and will see that my orders are carried out, not only in regard to you, but to any one else who harbors such designs!”

Thus Polly’s good intentions were snuffed out permanently. Not so with the placid Aunt Mary.

“Valda,” said that estimable lady, “I never knew before that you were both silly and absurd. As for Mr. Morson—no matter what these criminal charges are, I refuse to accept them. I have seen him with my own eyes, and I refuse—positively!”

“But,” protested Valda, holding down her temper as best she might, “since you acknowledge your ignorance of these charges, how can you say the man is innocent?”

“*Noblesse oblige!*” retorted Aunt Mary proudly, triumphantly. “No young man with eyes and a name like his can be other than a gentleman. *Noblesse oblige!*”

At this point the noble defense had risen to her feet. She did more. She rose from that state of serene placidity which had gripped her for forty-three good years, and spoke her mind—as Valda herself said afterward—“like a rag-

ing unicorn." This was, perhaps, a slight exaggeration; but Aunt Mary certainly spoke her mind.

"Valda Girard," she said, "this is not *your* yacht. It belongs, from stem to stern, to my half-brother Marcus. I knew him twenty years before you did, and will *not* take orders from his foolish child! You may put me in irons—you may cut my head off—but I tell you, flatly, I will speak with Mr. Bruce Morson when and how and where I choose! In years you are old enough to know better; in common sense you are young enough to be spanked!"

With this final slur upon Valda's capabilities as a yacht's master, Aunt Mary swept majestically away to put her threat of speaking with Mr. Bruce Morson into immediate execution.

Now this was open mutiny; but a mutiny always starts that way, for if everybody did exactly what everybody else wanted done, there never would be any mutinies at all.

Miss Polly moved off in a state of unholy glee. As for Valda, she hunted up Captain Joe for consolation and advice, but mainly for consolation.

To that worthy seaman she recited as much of the recent occurrences as she could without placing Mr. Marcus Girard in a metaphorical lock-up; and while much of the smuggling de-

tail was, perforce, suppressed, still the prevarications of Mr. Morson-Brown were brought out very clearly.

Captain Joe listened with grave attention. He even lit his pipe in order to give the matter every chance of earnest, level-minded thought; but when she had finished, he scratched his chin, puffed clouds of smoke, and shook his grizzled head.

"Miss Valda," he observed contemplatively, "I guess he did lie some; but then again, you can't be certain. Now if I was to tell you how once, down Jamaica ways, I went to sleep and tumbled off the stern of the Lucy Allen and come mighty near to being snapped up by a big black shark——"

But Valda was not interested in sharks—at least not real ones—so she delicately hinted at the fact. The Captain grinned and changed the subject.

"Well," he temporized, "I tell you what we'll do. I'll have a talk, in private, with this Morson lubber and hear what he's got to say, and then——"

Valda interrupted him.

"Captain Joe," she said, and her tone was charged with stern authority, "you will do nothing of the kind! You are already unreasonably prejudiced against Mr. Ormond and Mr. Tracy,

and will be only too willing to be taken in by that scalawag's insidious blandishments. Really, Captain Joe, you don't know, but—but he's so plausible. It's his regular, wicked business! And therefore I must ask you not to discuss the subject with him in any way, even if he comes to you. Just keep him in his place, register him on the yacht's books as George C. Brown, and see that he does his work. That's all."

"All right," agreed the Captain, with a careless shrug, "it's all one to *me*. *My* sailing orders are straight and simple—to reach New York by the twentieth—and I'll do it if God spares me and her boilers last."

Valda went back on deck and sat down alone. Apparently there was nothing else to do, for every one was against her. Captain Joe was against her—he showed it plainly. Polly was against her, and at this very moment was giggling like a silly idiot; and Aunt Mary was in open mutiny. Valda could see that lady now, returning from her defiant interview with the reprobate; and human curiosity got the better of contempt.

"Well," she asked, with just a shade of sarcastic spite, "did your cherub unfold his wings?"

"No, he did not," replied the placid one, steadying herself against the rail, for the Spit-

fire was wallowing her way through a cross sea; “he unfolded very little.” Aunt Mary looked a trifle puzzled, then admitted candidly: “Do you know, my dear, that odd young man is extremely reticent as to his past? I talked with him for fully fifteen minutes, and while he was at all times most courteous and agreeable, still there is a something in his air—an almost humorous something—which creates a barrier. I think I shall lie down for a little.”

Valda smiled, for the first time in two hours; but it was a grim sort of smile, without much pleasure in it. She was glad that some one else was getting a taste of Mr. Morson-Brown; but even this could not bring back her perfect happiness. The man worried her. He was on her nerves, and refused to be forgotten, even for the smallest fraction of a minute.

“Yes,” she admitted grudgingly to herself, “he’s just like a spot on your back that itches and you can’t reach it!”

CHAPTER IX

THE ETHICS OF GOOD POKER

FOR five days the Spitfire had been kicking her way through a comparatively quiet sea. Her double expansion engines snored rhythmically, voicing no complaint at the extra speed. Not so with the stoking gentlemen below decks. Indeed, it seemed to them—in view of the Captain's orders “to tear the insides out of her”—that they must shovel such stupendous quantities of coal in this world as to relieve them of a similar responsibility in the next.

Therefore, the Spitfire hummed from stem to stern with a vibratory, high-keyed chant, as she rolled from side to side or “shot the chutes” of a specially majestic swell; and those on board waited patiently, in their shuffled state, for the dealer of destinies to lay them out in pairs or threes of a kind, or in any other combinations known to chance.

Valda had not yet reinstated Ormond to command of the yacht, although she had made a slight concession. At a sagacious hint from that cautious gentleman, the Spitfire's course

had been altered to a distance of some fifty miles from the beaten track of regular ocean liners. This was done, not with any cowardly desire of baffling a possible pursuit, but if there is one business under the sun which does not thrive on the tonic of advertisement, that business is the delicate art of smuggling.

Valda determined to express her own views of this particular trade when she should meet her father in New York; but in the meantime the least she could do was to be polite to her father's friends, although her laudable intention was frequently strained by the tendency of Mr. Tracy to open his mouth. He was a sort of Pandora's box, and, in spite of the efforts of Ormond and all the gods, it was quite impossible to keep his lid on.

As for Ormond, he was certainly acting with tact and discretion. He never intruded upon the society of the ladies unless invited to do so, at which times he spared no pains in entertaining them to the best of his ability. After his first interview with Valda, concerning Mr. Girard's departure from the path of rectitude, he avoided the subject with instinctive deference to a young girl's sense of right and wrong. At the fall of Mr. Morson-Brown he may have rejoiced secretly; but he made no open allusion to it, nor did he offer one suggestion in the man-

agement of the yacht's affairs; for between Valda and himself there was a tacit understanding that she should remain the master of the Spitfire until the moment of their meeting with Marcus Girard at Sandy Hook. This gentlemanly quiescence troubled Valda somewhat; still, as matters were running very smoothly, she saw no reason to invite unforeseen complications by altering the restful state.

As for Mr. Morsom-Brown, she had completely ignored him for three days; which cruelty, however, seemed to have little or no effect upon his buoyancy of spirits, for to all outward appearances he not only was resigned to his humiliating duties, but got a sort of humorous enjoyment out of them. This was disconcerting. Moreover, the Spitfire's crew, to a man, received him as a comrade and a brother. He was one of them! At mess hour the seamen's dining cabin echoed with subdued shouts of merriment, and there was little doubt as to who might be the instigator of this glad festivity. Yes, he was one of them; and yet not one of them either, in its strictest sense, for they somehow looked up to him with that indefinable, wondering respect which the lowly mind must ever pay to a roystering leader.

Valda felt that Aunt Mary's mutiny was having its effect; for if this insufferable creature

continued to win the affections of every soul on board, he would soon be in a position to rise up in the night, scuttle the Spitfire, and force its mistress to walk the plank. It was nonsense, of course, and she knew it, though in her present frame of mind she considered him entirely capable of the deed.

On the other hand, a pleasing ray of hope came peeping from out the gloom; for beside herself there was one person on board the yacht who entertained no affection for Mr. Morson-Brown whatever, and that person was Beasley. The mate had not forgotten the little episode in his own cabin when his own best suit of clothes was donned by this stuck-up aristocrat—this airy first class passenger who had, by a supercilious raising of his brows, reminded Beasley of the social gulf which yawned between them. But now their relative positions were happily reversed. There was likewise a gulf between a common seaman and a first mate; so Beasley smiled all over and prepared to give the aristocrat an object lesson in physical geography.

The mate held that an apprentice, on any sailing craft, should begin at the bottom; therefore he started Mr. Morson-Brown at the bottom, with the intention of allowing him to work up by very slow degrees indeed. No task was too menial or disagreeable for the green hand's

education; but the green hand not only performed all such duties cheerfully, but did them well, a state of affairs which hardly tended to the peace of mind of his exacting master. Beasley then changed his tactics, allowing the aristocrat to work upward by jumps, so to speak; that is to say, he was sent to the very top of the Spitfire's slender mast. True, the yacht's sailing gear was seldom used; but if, in the opinion of the first mate, the mast and spars required an extra coat of varnish, it was not in the province of any one on board to dispute it with him. Thus it came to pass that the masts and spars were varnished.

Now Valda approved of menial labors, and, like the mate, she deemed such training to be designed for the ultimate good of a seaman's soul; yet causing a novice to crawl around in dizzy, dangerous places was quite another matter. When first she observed the green hand balancing himself gracefully on a wabbly spar, her heart, in spite of her every disclination, began to flutter wildly. It was most unfair, she thought, to place an inexperienced man at such a perilous altitude, and she made up her mind to discuss the subject with Beasley in corrective detail; but, on overhearing a chance remark, her determination was reversed completely. She was standing on the bridge, while just beneath

her Mr. Morson-Brown was chatting pleasantly with a brother seaman.

“Say,” said the seaman sympathetically, “I’m awful sorry old Beasley gave you that varnishin’ job. He done it on purpose too, kinder hopin’ to get a fall out of you, as you might say.”

“Oh, that’s all right,” returned the green hand carelessly; “I don’t mind it—not a bit. You see,” he explained, “I’ve been doing bridge work for a year or two, and when a man gets used to waltzing across a four-inch truss with nothing but three hundred feet of atmosphere between him and hell—well, it gives him a sense of equilibrium. But on a little bit of a toy yacht like this, with a nice, soft ocean to drop in——”

He paused to laugh; but Valda did not pause for anything. She went away immediately, to the very farthest end of the yacht, where she sat down alone, and refrained from tears only by the utmost physical exertion. This man was continually doing things to annoy her—to shatter what little hope of happiness was left in life. She had felt sorry for him, in a purely abstract way, and now he rewarded her misplaced sympathy by a false claim of utterly abandoned recklessness. Very well, if that was the manner in which he accepted her humane interest in him, he could break his hateful neck and wel-

come! She would even look on calmly—when he lay there so white and still—and say, without one single tremor of her lip:

“Captain Joe, remove that body if you please, and steer the yacht’s course a point or two nor’ by west.”

In this placid and complacent frame of mind, she was approached by Beasley. He was literally wreathed in smiles. He bowed before her deferentially.

“Miss Valda,” he said, “before we make port, I think the decks ought to be holy-stoned. It isn’t absolutely necessary; but it might *look* better.” The mate paused, then continued, with deference oozing out of every pore of his red skin: “So I thought I’d just come and ask if you had any preference as to what man was to be put on the work.”

For an instant Valda regarded him through half closed eyes, as if about to read him a lecture upon moral degeneracy; but in the instant she saw a mental picture of a certain daredevil waltzing across a four-inch truss, and her point of view was shifted.

“Why, no,” she answered sweetly; “that detail is entirely within your own jurisdiction, and I have no desire to interfere in any way. Most certainly our decks should be holy-stoned—*thoroughly!* Kindly see to it, Mr. Beasley.”

"Thank you," returned the deferential mate, and went away rubbing his big red hands.

Valda continued to sit at the far end of the yacht, brooding over another matter which occupied her mind, and had done so for two whole days. Mr. Morson-Brown accepted his present position with a species of bland serenity which, to say the least, was puzzling. If his story of the robbery were true, then why did he seem to take no interest in his loss? If, to put it on another ground, he was a customs house official on the trail of Ormond and Tracy, then why did he not confront these men with the charge of smuggling and force them, in the name of the law, to disgorge the goods? Instead of doing any of these things, he seemed meekly content to varnish masts and polish rails, or to forgather with common seamen and willingly desecrate the sacred name of caste.

However, when intelligent people want information, the best thing to do is to go straight after it; so Valda sighed and went in search of Mr. Morson-Brown, finding him engaged in gymnastic labors at the very tip end of the bowsprit. She had no inclination to talk to him, of course; but this was a business matter concerning her own interests which she had a perfectly legitimate right to investigate. As to the manner of investigation, she would treat him with

that dignified superiority which is eminently proper in a master who controls the bodies, minds, and souls of those who sail the seas and go down in ships.

“Brown,” she said, “come here!”

Brown came. He came with alacrity, but with due respect to the lofty being who had summoned him. Also, he removed his sailor hat and pulled his fore-lock.

Valda was furious. Clearly this beast was laughing at her. He took a satanic delight in it; though, to judge by his solemn and submissive mien, he might have been born of the humblest origin, having all ambition completely warped in early youth.

Miss Girard herself was an aristocrat, by birth and station. It was not for her to demean her standards by noticing such *bourgeois* antics in a servant. In fact, she did not notice him at all, but spoke again, in a level and distant tone:

“Brown,” she said, “for a man in your position—a man who claims to have lost everything on earth—you seem to be taking matters rather coolly.”

“And why shouldn’t I,” he asked, “when everything is coming my way?”

She did not speak, but looked a permit for his explanation, so he hitched his trousers and enlightened her:

“You see, ma’am,” he began, employing the vernacular of the class into which she had forced him, “I know to a certainty that my swag is on board your yacht. Just where, is of course a question; but I’ll find out later on. In the meantime, I have a very pleasant berth, rare good food, an occasional peg of grog, light housework of various kinds, and an abnormally considerate mistress. If I may make so bold, ma’am, I am having the time of my life.”

The devil was in his eyes again; but Valda strove to display no consciousness of the fact, and succeeded with tolerable results.

“My man——” she began again, severely; but he checked her with a politely lifted hand:

“Excuse me, but I haven’t finished quite. When we slip anchor in port—God willing—and if I haven’t recovered my property by then—I’ll lay my complaint before the proper parties and have the whole crew of you locked up in jail. I may possibly make an exception of your Aunt Mary; but I haven’t fully decided. When I do——”

But Valda did not wait to hear the rest. There is a limit to human dignity, even as there is a limit to feminine endurance in the matter of human tears; so she went to her own stateroom and had it out with herself and her toilet articles. When tranquillity was again restored,

she ordered her lunch sent in to her, then for three peaceful hours she read a most charming book; but later she was astonished to find that she did not remember one single, solitary thing about it.

When later still she dressed and came on deck, she was astonished for the second time. Quite by accident she discovered Miss Polly Thurman and Mr. Morson-Brown seated comfortably in the shadow of a small-boat with their heads very close together, engaged in earnest conversation.

Now this was in direct violation of the yacht's discipline. Not only were the seamen never permitted to converse with the Spitfire's guests, but Polly herself had received strict orders to have nothing whatever to do with this particular seaman. They were equally reprehensible, these two; but now they were caught red-handed; so Valda, assuming the air of a queen of tragedy, swept down upon them.

"Polly," she commanded, with marked severity, "go to my stateroom and wait for me! Go at once!"

Polly looked defiant and held her ground; but her confederate offered no assistance, so she pouted and obeyed. Then Valda turned to the other conspirator:

"Mr. Brown," she began coldly, this time giv-



"Polly," Commanded Valda, "Go to My Stateroom at Once!"

ing him no excuse to drop into his sailor language, "really, I am amazed at you!" He made no answer; so she was forced to define her latest brand of disapproval. "To think," she exclaimed, "of your sitting calmly here and flirting with that child—deliberately!"

He raised his eyes to hers, but failed to look either guilty or contrite.

"Miss Girard," he replied, "granted that you are right, which I beg to assure you is not the case, I have studied the yacht's rules carefully and find nothing therein prohibitive to flirting with the Spitfire's guests."

"Then I make it a rule," flashed Valda, "here and now! You are to hold no communication with my guests whatever! Do you understand?"

"Yes, perfectly," he agreed. "The next time I am asked questions by the ladies, I shall endeavor to follow the new rule and be as impolite as possible."

Valda's big brown eyes snapped wrathfully. "I did not mean that, Mr. Brown, and you know it. My men are supposed to be civil at all times. If questions are asked, they are to be answered, simply and with respect. I will put one now. How long were you talking with Miss Thurman?"

"Well, I don't know exactly," he answered

gravely. "I think Mr. Ormond has my watch; but——"

"Stop!" cried Valda. "How dare you make such a vile insinuation against my friend?"

"But, my dear young lady," he argued in polite surprise, "I am merely answering your question, simply and with respect." His gray eyes twinkled, and his handsome mouth was twitching at the corners. "Besides," he added, "my watch was rather an expensive one, and I've often thought myself that the emerald I was telling you about would make an exceedingly attractive fob. Presuming your friend Mr. Ormond to be a gentleman of taste——"

Again she interrupted him, but this time in a way which astonished even herself, for she burst out laughing. She had not meant to laugh; but who could remain angry with this big shouledered, good looking boy whose wine of youth was continually bubbling over with the bead of mischief? Valda straightened her features and summoned back the remnants of her dignity.

"Why can't you be serious for once?" she asked. "If you had only been serious from the first, it might have been so different." She did not mean to say this precisely; but he did not dispute it with her, so she hastened to change the subject: "It was very wrong of you to hold this clandestine meeting with Miss Thur-

man, and you know it too. What did you tell the child—that long and remarkable story of your stolen gems?"

"No," he returned, "I was interrupted."

Valda bit her lip and tried again,

"Then what *were* you telling her?"

The young man cast down his eyes, raised them again, and answered in a tone of honesty:

"I turned over a brand new leaf, and told her—the truth."

"What!"

"I told her," he continued, baring his head by way of solemn emphasis, "I told her I was a social missionary, just arrived from the planet Mars, on a skyrocket specially constructed for the carrying of my twenty-seven trunks, my five valets, and—"

Again Valda laughed—freely, openly—in keen enjoyment of her own discomfiture; for be it known that she too had a sense of humor, although in the last few days it had been buried beneath an avalanche of serious happenings. Yet, even with a sense of humor, it did not occur to her that she was now violating the yacht's discipline by openly conversing, on terms of equality, with a common seaman. This was possibly because she was doing it herself. If any one else had done it—as Polly did, for instance—it would have been very different in-

deed; but then this is only human, for it does make a difference as to who does a thing, and if you've ever tried it yourself, you'll *see* the difference.

"Mr. Brown," said Valda, alluding to his Martian skyrocket, "of course you mean that it is none of my business as to what you were discussing with Miss Thurman, and possibly you are right; but what I can't understand is why you talked to her at all."

"Because," he returned, with a grave expression of wonder at the trend of her remarks, "because I admire the young lady, vastly."

"Why?" asked Valda; then immediately wanted to bite off her tongue for asking. But the tactless slip had been made, and it was now beyond recall; besides he was answering. Also, he was looking straight into her eyes, and his own were bold, while his deep voice held a note of seriousness which she had never before detected:

"I admire her because she is tall and straight and fine—because her eyes are big and brown—and because of her glorious, red hot temper."

Now Valda knew perfectly that Polly was *not* tall and straight and fine. On the contrary, she was short and petite and impertinent. Her eyes were *not* big and brown, but big and blue and doll babyish. As for the glorious, red hot

temper, Miss Girard rose up in the regal majesty of it. This time she *was* angry, and for two reasons. In the first place, this unknown creature—this penniless adventurer—had dared to proclaim his brazen admiration for her—for *her!*—the daughter of a millionaire and as far above him as the stars are above the frogs. In the second place, he had not actually *said* he meant her, and therefore she was in no position to grab the compliment. Again, any outward display of glorious, red hot temper would prove to him that she understood, and this was not to be suffered for a single instant. But what was she to do? The spot on her back was itching again, and she could not reach it. Still her woman's dignity was left, and now it came to her deliverance, permitting her to swallow down her wrath and to speak with cold and withering scorn.

"Mr. Brown," she said, employing a carefully measured tone, "since coming aboard my yacht, you have caused nothing but sorrow and disappointment. You have completely destroyed my pleasure in this trip, and I wish to goodness I had never been fool enough to stop and pick you up out of the sea!"

He looked at her fixedly to see if she meant it, then answered with grave respect:

"I'm sorry I cannot share your wish, for to

me this trip has been a thing to be remembered; but if you really feel that way about it, your trouble is easily corrected. Just say a word, and I'll go *back* into the sea."

He moved toward the rail, as if to put his mad suggestion into effect; then paused as Valda flung up her firm, square chin. But for once he had misinterpreted. She had him at last! Ah, now was her chance to repay this braggart in the coin of his own deceitful mintage—to brand him with the very iron which he foolishly placed within her reach! She stood before him, tall and straight and fine, and her big brown eyes were glittering.

"Mr. Brown," she said calmly, knowing full well that he had as little idea of going back into the sea as he had of returning to the planet Mars, "*I—wish—you—would!*"

He stood there in speechless wonder; then he smiled. His smile spread slowly, expanding into a sheepish grin; and Valda could have shouted for the very triumph of it, but she gave no sign. It was good to see a rascal caught in the trap of his own invention; so she waited calmly for the iron jaws to close.

"Miss Girard," said the grinning victim, "I told you once that you knew nothing whatever of the game called poker. Now *I do*; and one of the ethics of that artistic vice is this: never

make a bluff unless you are prepared to back it up."

She did not fully understand his words; but she did understand his actions, for he swung himself over the rail, stood poised for an instant in easy grace, smiled at her again—and dived into the Atlantic Ocean.

Now, for a lady intent upon causing a suicide, Valda acted strangely. She cast the ethics of poker to the seven winds and bounded up the ladder leading to the pilot-house. In an instant more there was a jingling of little bells, a churning swirl of propeller blades, the clang of a gong, the patter of swiftly running feet, and a shrill, reëchoed cry of "*Man overboard!*"

While the small-boat was being lowered, every one swarmed to the rail and fired excited questions at every one else, although it was generally understood among the seamen that Beasley's designs in placing an inexperienced man in danger had reaped results. Valda alone knew the cause of the commotion, but said nothing. She was trying to figure out whether Mr. Morson-Brown, in his remark about backing up a bluff, had reference to himself or to her.

However, when the scalawag was rescued for the second time and brought on deck, his apology took the form of a perfectly rational explana-

tion, relieving Miss Girard of any share in the rattlebrain proceeding.

"Captain Larris," he said, "I'm very sorry to have caused you all this trouble by my clumsiness, and will see that it doesn't occur again."

Captain Joe, who really liked the fellow in spite of Valda's doubts, glared angrily at Beasley and ordered the dripping one below for dry clothing and a glass of grog; but Valda had other plans.

"Wait!" she commanded. "I wish to speak with him—alone."

Several people noted the grim expression about her mouth, and wondered what she could possibly have to say to him. Surely it must be something of vast importance which could not wait for a gentleman to change his clothes; but, being none of their affair, they drew their own conclusions and obeyed with varying degrees of grace. Then Valda turned upon the poker-player, though the expected burst of anger did not show itself.

"Mr. Brown," she said, "no doubt you are proud at having humiliated me a second time; but what you have done was both cruel and unmanly, knowing as you must that no Christian woman can stand calmly by and watch a fellow creature drown—not even a dog, if she can help it. That you knew I would stop the yacht, is no

excuse for you. The offence to me was just the same, and it hurt me—more than I can say."

She had spoken earnestly, with the quietness of pained reproach, and the man beside her flushed.

"Miss Girard," he answered, gently and in the simplicity of truth, "you won't believe me, possibly, but I'm mighty sorry. It *was* unmanly—yes, and cruel—but I didn't stop to think. I can only hope in time that you may forget it and forgive."

Beyond a doubt he was earnest in his regrets, and Valda might have spared herself much trouble had she heeded him; but, in view of past experiences, she placed small credence in his serious attitude.

"No," she returned, "I will not forgive you, and I couldn't forget it in the face of all the other things you've done. And now I'm going to tell you what I think of you."

And she did. She did it for fifteen minutes, catching her breath with the art of an experienced singer who sings and sings and never seems to pause. She started in at the beginning and roasted him to a crisp brown. She lifted up the veil from his wicked past and reduced him to the consistency of shredded wheat. Out of his own false mouth she convicted him, supplying the missing links by the aid of a ripe

imagination. Then, when she had quite finished, she started all over again, catching up the little details which had eluded her in the stress of hurry. She flayed him to the raw. She flayed him up and she flayed him down; then she crossed it, till his morals resembled a double width bolt of Scotch plaid. She dwelt for a little space upon his hopeless future, and stopped from sheer exhaustion.

In the beginning, Mr. Morson-Brown had listened attentively and in apparent shame; but, gradually, as the castigating criticism grew in vigor and in warmth, the old expression of impishness crept back into his eyes. He did not dare to look at her, but fixed his gaze on the little boat which had snatched him from a watery grave for the second time—and smiled.

“Well?” demanded Valda, hotly. “At what are you laughing, Mr. Brown?”

“Oh, nothing particular,” he answered musingly, glancing into her big brown eyes, then back at the lettering on the bow of the little boat. “I was just wondering how your delightful yacht ever happened to get its delightful name.”

CHAPTER X

FROM THE VIEW OF AN EXPERT

LATE that night Ormond and Tracy lay abed in the private stateroom of Mr. Marcus Girard; but they were not asleep.

"Jim," said Tracy, presently, "I want to ask a question."

"All right," agreed Ormond, with a drowsy lack of interest. "Fire away."

Tracy considered his subject matter thoughtfully, and led up to his point before actually firing:

"It ain't about me," he began, "and it ain't about you. It's about a friend of mine." Again he paused before coming to the crucial question, and resumed: "This friend of mine he owns some property—right valuable too, but done up in a smallish bundle. See? He gives this bundle to another friend that locks it up in an iron safe. Now then! If you were my friend—the first one, I mean—and the second friend was out of town, and you wanted to open that safe so as to use your own bundle—well—how would you *get* it open?"

"Simplicity itself," returned the active-minded Mr. Ormond. "If I wanted to open it bad enough, I'd *blow* it open."

"Thanks," said the private secretary. "Good night, Jim."

For two full minutes there was silence in the sumptuously appointed stateroom, then Ormond spoke again:

"Tracy, old man, if that friend of yours is ever in need of further information, you can give him some excellent advice."

"What's that?" asked the seeker after wisdom.

"Tell him," said Ormond, smiling up into the darkness, "to keep his damned mouth shut."

Mr. Tracy made no answer. What was the use? At times he played certain games of chance himself, and his friend's suggestion ranked also, among the ethics of good poker.

CHAPTER XI

THE PASSING OF MR. BEASLEY

THE time honored custom of holy-stoning a ship's deck is productive of three results: a polished surface, pyrotechnic profanity, and housemaid's knee. As to the origin of the term, authorities differ widely. One eminent and nautical scientist asserts that the stone was called "holy" by reason of the fact that it was the most *unholy* chunk of mineral ever excavated; and, assuming human nature to be contrary—a state conceded by a vast majority of erudite and married savants—the theory is not at all a bad one. Other giant minds think otherwise; but what do we care, anyway?

In olden days the art of holy-stoning was practised along rather crude lines. There was a large piece of sand-stone with ropes tied through holes at both ends, and by means of these ropes two martyred sailors dragged the cleanly Juggernaut backward and forward over a water-doused deck. This was sometimes done with the object of actually scouring the deck; at other times as a sort of barbarous pun-

ishment; and still again, it is claimed, in order to crush and obliterate the bumptious spirits of certain gentlemen who were prone to mutiny or other active sports.

In later days the art has been refined. The stone is smaller and is manipulated by one man, who gets down on his marrowbones and stays there for five or six hours on a stretch—his reverential attitude, and the continuance thereof, setting up still another theory as to the name “Holy-stone.” All ships’ officers aver, with serene positiveness, that the work is neither hard nor mortifying to the flesh. The average seaman prefers crocheting a mainsail; but that, in all probability, is due to personal prejudice.

At any rate, on a fine September morning, with a faint stern breeze and under a particularly conscientious sun, Mr. Morson-Brown was engaged in holy-stoning the Spitfire’s lower deck. He was attired in loose trousers, rubber-soled shoes, a short-sleeved undershirt, and an overcoat of profuse perspiration.

Habitually he performed his duties with a sort of humorous enjoyment; but on this one occasion that element of pleasure was not prominent, for he had been in an attitude of prayer since seven o’clock, and it was now nine-fifteen. The attitude, however, was postural only, for the young man was swearing to him-

self with that finished and masterful proficiency which is usually attributed to pirates.

He had made a mental calculation as to the area of the two decks in square feet, computing the portion already holy-stoned in two hours and a quarter to be just one-tenth of the whole. The outlook was gloomy. Besides, there was another factor in the case. To labor for the caprices of the fascinating Miss Girard was one thing; to labor for the pure, malignant joy of Beasley was quite another. Therefore, Mr. Morson-Brown's affection for the mate began to partake of that quality of love with which a sailor regards a holy-stone.

His position was a peculiar one, and he himself was far too intelligent not to appreciate the advantage of Beasley. Sea law provides that a social chasm shall yawn between man and master, and the man must grin and bear such buffets as come to him, even as the ship which carries him must adapt herself to the force of every wind that blows. Mr. Morson-Brown had never considered, till now, what a nasty thing this sea law really was, and its meaning was vastly aided by the fact that Beasley passed by from time to time and criticised his work.

There are various methods of effective criticism—the grave, the light, the honest, and the

ignorant, each hard in its way for the human soul to bear; but the most accursed of all is that of ridicule. Beasley selected the latter and applied it after the manner of a turpentine stupe. The under dog bore it with outward stoicism, knowing that open rebellion would bear the fruit of harsher treatment; so he gritted his teeth and swore to obey with grace, even if the first mate ordered him to bite the barnacles from the Spitfire's keel. It was a struggle, though, hot, long, and bitter; and the young man, still upon his knees, asked God to help him *not* to throw Mr. Beasley overboard.

At nine-thirty Miss Valda Girard came out on the upper deck, where she seated herself comfortably with a book in her lap. Her position was such as to be entirely screened from the observation of the prostrated scrubber below, yet she herself might peep over at will and watch him while he scrubbed. She knew it was horrid work; but the man deserved it. He had called her a spitfire. Of course, she admitted, he had not, in plain English, called her a spitfire, but his sly reference to the yacht's name, coupled with his hateful smile and his beautiful eyes all crinkled up at the corners with unholy joy, left little doubt as to his meaning.

Valda was incensed with him for two rea-

sons. In the first place, to insinuate a thing, without actually saying it, is about the meanest way in the whole world of calling people names. In the second place, she had thought over the tongue-lashing given him just prior to his offence, and—well, one of the hardest things in life to forgive a friend, a relation, or an enemy, is being absolutely in the right.

But one fact remained by itself and stood out boldly, casting all others in the shade: even if she was a spitfire—which was silly and absurd to think of—Mr. Morson-Brown was not in a position to remind her of the attribute. Therefore, she was justified in her righteous indignation, and would watch him holy-stone her decks till either he or the holy-stone was worn to a state of disintegration.

She looked on his labors for twenty minutes, and really got a species of genuine pleasure out of it. Twice she heard him swear; and, while she did not as a rule approve of swearing, it added a sugar lump of joy to her already brimming cup. Mr. Morson-Brown at last was paying the piper, while she, ensconced on her throne above him and causing his present woe, was certainly the piper.

She peeped cautiously over the edge of the deck again and became absorbed in watching his back. It was a splendid back, broad at the

shoulders and tapering to his slender waist, while beneath his cotton undershirt she could see the muscles coil and writhe as his powerful arms worked back and forth with the slide of the holy-stone. It was fascinating to watch this manly display of strength, now utterly wasted in the duties of a scrubwoman, and, in spite of herself, Valda felt a trifle sorry; then, suddenly, she ducked her head at the sound of approaching footsteps.

Ormond came strolling leisurely along, followed by Tracy, who seemed endeavoring to maintain the traditional silence of the Sphinx. On catching sight of the scrubber, Ormond's eyes lit up with a joy that was beautiful to behold. There was no need of words. He knew of a more artistic method of tormenting an enemy. Therefore, he stood and watched the work, chuckling to himself and calling Tracy's attention to the holy-stoner in mortifying pantomime. Presently he sighed dismally, sauntered over to Tracy, and spoke:

“Dear me! Think of doing washwork, when others sit on deck—with the ladies.”

Mr. Morson-Brown rose to his knees, bit his lip, and went back to work again, while Valda was filled with impish, unbounded delight.

“Say!” whispered Tracy, tugging gently at

his friend's coat sleeve, "ain't you rubbin' it in a bit too strong?"

"No," laughed Ormond; "I'm doing it for the good of his soul."

Valda, from her vantage point above the men, nodded in approval; but the secretary was not quite so certain.

"Better let him alone," he suggested respectfully. "He's got a punch up his sleeve, he has; and when it lands, there goin' to be something doing."

Ormond, however, was not in the least troubled over such trivialities, for he once more approached the deck-washer and stood above him, laughing softly. Mr. Morson-Brown looked up.

"See here!" he said, "it seems to be your turn now; but you wait. We'll reach New York in a few days now, and then it will be *my* turn. All I want is to be locked up in a room—for just fifteen minutes—with you and that private secretary of yours."

Tracy rolled his eyes, but said nothing. Ormond looked down with his most exasperating smile.

"Oh, I dare say you'll be locked up all right. Indeed, from what I can gather, it's a certainty." Morson-Brown went back to work, while his tormentor added a homeopathic dose

of sarcasm: "At any rate, you will then be in no danger of masked burglars." Even this failed to elicit a reply; so he tried allopathy: "I'm just wondering, Mr. Brown, whether you are really a customs house official, or merely an adventurer—following Miss Girard."

Valda rose partially to her feet in indignation; Mr. Morson-Brown rose entirely.

"Drop that!" he commanded angrily, pointing a wet and trembling finger at Ormond's finely chiseled nose. "You can torment me all you please and be hanged to you; but mention that lady's name again, and, by God, I'll thrash you!"

Valda, sinking into her seat again, looked happily astonished. Ormond gave up his experimental mode of practice and turned to Tracy:

"Bless me, how belligerent! He's positively bloodthirsty!" Once more he addressed his victim, smiling in earnest solicitude: "Really, Mr. Brown, it distresses me to see you work with so little system. If I might suggest——"

He did not finish his sentence, for the Southerner dipped his mop in the water-bucket and made the pardonable error of sprinkling Ormond instead of the deck.

Valda, in spite of her resentment against

Morson-Brown, was positively delighted. Mr. Ormond, on the contrary, turned livid, and in a moment more might have realized Tracy's prophecy of "something doing," had Miss Polly not come suddenly on the scene.

"Stop it!" she commanded, stamping a very small and very shapely foot. "You let him alone!"

"But, my dear Miss Thurman," he began; but Polly cut him short.

"It serves you right for annoying him. Oh, I heard you," she went on, in rising warmth. "It's perfectly beastly for you to come out here and gloat over a person just because he has to work. Now you let him alone—immediately!—or I'll report you to Captain Larris!"

Ormond and Tracy retreated from the field, leaving her a flushed but happy victor. Valda, for some unaccountable reason, shifted her mental position and took sides with the conquerors.

"Miss Polly," said Morson-Brown in a grateful tone of voice, "it was mighty sweet of you to help me out—just bully!"

"It wasn't!" declared Polly, with a show of spirit. "It was only justice. I'm simply disgusted with every soul on board this yacht—Valda Girard especially!"

The party under criticism again shifted her mental position and began to take sides *against* the conquerors.

Polly contemplated the art of holy-stoning for a while, then asked gently:

“Is—is the work *very* hard, Mr. Morson?”

“Not a bit of it,” he lied. “I like it! You see, I expect to marry some day, and am getting myself in training by this particular form of light housework. Better look out, or you’ll get splashed.”

But Polly was not afraid of being splashed.

“Mr. Morson,” she said, “if you’ll wait till I change my skirt, I’ll help you.”

Valda thought up a curtain lecture for a certain young woman, but deferred it for a more propitious time. Morson-Brown knelt up and looked at little Polly, tenderly and with a smile.

“That’s awfully good of you, my dear; but it couldn’t be done, even if I’d let you. It’s against the rules of—of the Spitfire.”

He laughed to himself as he said this, and Valda felt instinctively that he was enjoying the double meaning of the yacht’s attractive name. She stopped feeling sorry for Mr. Morson-Brown, suddenly and entirely; while the sentiment was further heightened by Polly’s next remarks.

“It’s the rules of Valda Girard,” she stated hotly; “that’s what it is! And now I’m going to find her and give her a piece of my mind. Yes, sir! and I tell you there’s going to be one hot session! Good-by!”

She went hastily through the cabin door, and butted her sympathetic young head in the process, while the holy-stoner looked after her, lingeringly and with a sigh.

“Dear little Polly!” he murmured, almost beneath his breath; then attacked his work on the Spitfire’s deck, viciously and with all his splendid strength.

Valda sat on the upper deck and continued to watch him, wondering why she hated him so bitterly; though it might be, perhaps, because of impertinent females who continually flouted her authority and took his part. In other circumstances— No, there were *no* circumstances in which she could ever, even for the faintest, smallest fraction of a half a second— She stopped abruptly in her reverie and ducked her head at the sound of approaching steps, then listened attentively for any brand of irritation that might come upon that hateful Morson-Brown.

It came in the form of Beasley. He had thoughtfully come round to observe the green hand’s progress; and, to judge from his surly

tones the progress was anything but satisfactory.

"Is this all you've done?" he demanded roughly, pausing in his stride. "Why, a year-old kid could do better than that with the wet end of a nursing bottle. What's the matter with you anyway—tired?"

There was silence for a space and Valda felt, without seeing, that the holy-stoner was marshaling his utmost powers of restraint.

"Well," the mate demanded, "can't you answer? Don't you know anything at all about a ship's deck?"

"Yes," said Mr. Morson-Brown, in quiet dignity; "I know, for example, that a deck is susceptible to polish—a quality not always possessed by officers in authority."

"What d'ye mean?" roared Beasley.

"That I'm doing the best I can," returned the Southerner, still quietly. "If you will kindly demonstrate your own more efficient method of giving a Turkish bath, I may, perhaps, do better."

There was a deal of politeness in this answer, and yet there was something else—a scorn-tipped Parthian shaft—a rankling hint that the mate, if not a gentleman, at least might qualify as a servant in a public "wash house."

This was subtle, perhaps; but Beasley un-



"Is This All You've Done?" the Mate Demanded

derstood, for Valda peeped over and saw him redden to the roots of his ugly hair. He was standing directly behind the kneeling man, and his action relieved him of the possibility of being called a gentleman. He raised one foot, set it in the middle of the other's back, then pushed him sprawling on the sloppy deck.

Valda leaped forward to the rail, but not more quickly than the victim of the mate's brutality regained his feet. She saw his handsome face distorted by the lash of rage—the eyes that glowed—the teeth that set in fury. Forgotten now were the laws which govern land and sea—forgotten was the gulf which lay between a master and a man; and Valda saw him crouch as the leopard crouches for its spring, the shoulders hunched—the head held low—and then she caught his eye.

He looked, and the fury faded from his face; his crouching figure became erect, while his fists unclenched and sank slowly to his sides. For an instant he stood in silence—painful silence—then he bowed and turned to his humble work again.

Beasley laughed. His small, untutored brain had misinterpreted; but Valda understood. She knew that a man had torn a something from his pride—had torn it by its very roots—and because of her. He had trampled on a law

which rules the hearts of courageous men, and because of a higher law of chivalry.

Now in Valda's veins ran also the blood of a fighting race. Indeed, old Oliver Cromwell was in part responsible for her present rôle in life. Besides, there was a certain venerable judge—a square-souled man who dispensed his justice with an honest tongue; and now these two old boys came back in spirit to whisper with a daughter of the Eagle. She harkened, while her own fair cheeks were tinged with red. She gripped the rail, and her heart was pounding furiously.

“Mr. Morson,” she called, “as the master of this yacht, I give you my full permission to avenge that insult to the limit of your strength and will.”

She had used his other name unconsciously; but somehow it seemed more fitting at the time, and it made her glad to use it. As for him, he simply stared at her, then he smiled, and the light of hope came back into his eyes. He made her a courtly bow. In it were mingled reverence, delight, and gratitude, though none might say which held the place of honor; then he turned upon his enemy. His words were not intended for Valda's ears, but her ears were sharp and she overheard.

“Mr. Beasley,” he said, in his modulated

Southern voice, "you have taken a hellish pleasure in making me wipe up this deck; and now, damn you! I'm going to do it with *you!*"

Beasley questioned his foe's ability along that line, and expressed himself without reserve. He knew the game, and felt entirely competent to dispose of him with a few well-planted blows; and yet there was an air about his lean antagonist which caused the mate to proceed with caution. He removed his coat, rolled up his sleeves to his hairy elbows, then tightened his belt and tossed his cap aside. He was ready now to put the finishing touches on a novice's education.

At this juncture Captain Joe walked out on the bridge, and, marking the pose of the men below, he started down the ladder on a run; but Valda checked him.

"Captain Joe," she called, "this is my affair, and you will please not interfere!"

The old sea dog gazed at her with a numbed expression of split-jawed wonder, then closed his mouth slowly, while a grin of pleasure illumined his rugged features. As long as the responsibility was lifted from his own official shoulders, he could enjoy a "go" as much as the next man; so he drew up a campstool to the edge of the bridge, seated himself in the

front row of the gallery, so to speak, and lit his pipe.

Meanwhile, seamen came from everywhere, silently, mysteriously, smelling out a happy trouble, as it were, and seeking positions of advantage to themselves, but of inconspicuousness to the mistress of the Spitfire.

“Time!” called Captain Larris. “Clang!” went the yacht’s bell, struck by the second mate, who lashed his wheel and leaned as far as possible out of a window in the pilot-house. “Twenty to one on Browny!” whispered an enthusiastic seaman hoarsely; but there were no takers, and the pugilists began to move in circles, watching each other in the manner of cautious cats.

As for Valda, this beginning completely upset all her preconceived ideas as to what a genuine fisticuff should be. She had thought to see the opponents rush together and pummel each other until one should cry “Enough!” then they would shake hands and brush their clothes. But this was different—horribly different. They began with such careful method—with the coolness employed in a friendly game of chess—and still there was something in their eyes which set her shivering.

Ormond strolled up and calmly lit one of Mr. Girard’s personal cigars. Tracy came also,

but with a more outward and visible sign of appreciation.

"Gee!" he observed soulfully. "Bare knuckles, one round, and to a finish—with no police interference! Gee!"

Had Aunt Mary been present, he might have now explained to her what he meant by his previous reference to the poet Keats; but, fortunately, both Miss Polly and that law-abiding lady were dressing in their staterooms. Otherwise there might have been police interference.

Valda, gripping the rail before her, looked down and shuddered. The men below kept moving their arms and feet, especially their feet, shifting in circles round and round, each watching for a weakness in the other's guard; then suddenly Beasley found it—or thought he had. His right fist swung, with his body's weight behind it, aimed full at the jaw of Morson-Brown; but the owner of the jaw ducked gracefully, received a left on his lifted shoulder, and retreated before the other's rush.

Valda crimsoned. Her champion was running away—backward, it was true, but running—shamelessly. He was a coward! Why didn't he stand his ground and return that blow? Why didn't he rush at Mr. Beasley as Mr. Beasley

rushed at him? Then presently she understood. Once more the mate swung wickedly. The Southerner stepped aside—easily—as one might avoid a passing car, while in a flash his fist licked out—like the tongue of a serpent, and landed with a pleasing thwack in the center of Mr. Beasley's countenance.

"Oh—you—*Brown!*" yelled a joyous admirer from the rigging; but the Captain looked up sharply and the noise subsided.

Beasley's head had jolted backward on his shoulders; but he snorted and came for more—and got it. His foe averted danger by the shifting of his nimble feet, the swaying of his body, while ever and again his left fist darted out and found its mark. The mark was variously distributed about the person of the mate, mainly the nasal organ, or that biblical point of vulnerability beneath a certain rib. If Beasley retreated, Morson-Brown was after him, in the manner of a hornet that mortifies a dog; but if Beasley rushed, then Morson-Brown would run away shamelessly—parrying blows, or receiving them on a hunched-up shoulder, yet ready at all times to stab with that quick left fist.

It was not the kind of battle to be viewed in prize rings, for neither of the men could claim professional ability; though be it said that many a ring has offered a far less interesting

affair—that is, from the raw, uncultured point of pugilism.

And Valda stood and watched it all. To the sensitive refinement of her nature, the thing was terrible; and yet she felt a weird, exotic tingling of her nerves—a pride in this man who battled at her bidding, and battled gloriously. It was wrong, beyond the shadow of a doubt, yet a graceful man in action is a thing to stir the gladiatorial taint that lingers in our blood; and Valda felt this ghostly savage stir. She could almost forget her bitterness against a human animal who moved as the leopard moves, whose keen eyes glittered when his face was turned to her, whose broad back writhed with dancing muscles as he spun away.

And yet, the horror of it! The bestiality! The thought that two men could thus unleash their passions, forgetting all else beyond the one desire to strike a fellow creature down! So Valda's emotions fought within her, while she gripped the deck rail with her icy hands—gripped it till her arms were aching and her heart was sick; then, in her nervous pain she cried out sharply.

She had not meant to cry, and, had she dreamed of its results, she would have stifled it or died. At its sound the Southerner looked up, and, in that instant of unwatchfulness, the

big mate struck him a terrific blow beneath the heart. It landed with a muffled thud, vicious, merciless, and the victim lurched backward against the rail, where he hung by the strength of his arms alone. His blue lips stretched and quivered at the corners; his eyes rolled back till little but their whites were seen; his flush winked out, and in its place crept a gray agony.

And Valda had caused this thing! She! She who had cried out foolishly, and had seen him pause in answer to her cry! Good God! Was this to be? There awoke in her heart a wondrous pity and a rage—a pity for him who suffered—a rage for him who wrought the suffering. It was thought no more, but instinct—that mother-instinct which sheds its very blood to protect its own—the fury of the female animal against a conquering beast. She longed to protect this stricken man with the shield of her own soft body. She longed to spring down upon the shoulders of the mate and tear him with her nails. It was so unfair of this great red brute to rush upon a helpless foe—to beat him to the deck with his mighty fists. It could not, should not, be!

There was a burny spot in the pit of her stomach that spread and spread with a suffocating, nauseous glow, till every fiber of her frame grew hot with mother-pity and with

mother-pain. Again she cried out sharply, but this time in command, raising her hand for the horrid cruelty to cease; but again the Southerner looked up, and in his eyes she read one short, courageous prayer:

“For God’s sake—*don’t!*”

For an instant Valda wavered, wondering; then she dropped her hand—she knew not why—and Morson ducked beneath the fists of the charging mate. Once more he was retreating, covering face and body with his swiftly moving arms, striking no blow, but retreating always, watchful lest he was forced against the rail.

Valda rejoiced to know that he was on his legs again; but she did not know that they were legs of lead, that they quivered and drooped beneath his weight, that every lightning step, which had its meaning, was made with pain unutterable. She did not know that his heart was protesting fiercely, that his lungs seemed scorched and raw, that his soul was pleading silently with Mars for the courage to hold his body on its feet.

Again the big mate rushed, striking viciously with a right arm swing; but his foeman ducked, as though bowing politely to Mr. Beasley; then, as the mate spun half around by the impetus of his fruitless blow, he received a rap which

caught him behind the ear and sent him plunging forward on his face.

Valda almost shrieked in triumph. Ah, now was Mr. Morson's chance! He could spring upon that fallen beast! He could seize him by his great red ears and bang his hateful head against the deck!

“Now! Now, you fool!” she whispered to herself; but the fool did nothing of the sort. Instead, he filled his lungs with a grateful breath of air, and waited calmly for the mate to rise. How foolish! How insane! To Valda's mind, he had flung away his chance, his one faint chance of victory; yet presently it came to her that this was a brave man's courtesy to a helpless foe, and her woman's heart gave tongue and paid its homage to a gentleman.

But perhaps it was not all courtesy, for the few inactive moments on the part of Beasley were invaluable to his weak antagonist, who before was fighting for breath, for life itself, and the respite brought him sweet relief. The flush returned into his cheeks, while the hazy blur departed from before his eyes; the fiery pain in his limbs was eased, and strength came trickling back into his arms. There was still a gulf between the master and the man, and he who leaped it first would be the master; there-

fore, Mr. Morson changed his tactics and prepared to take the leap.

This time he did not wait for Beasley, but pressed upon him, stinging him with short armed blows—a left that jabbed and jabbed—while, to make it worse, the right would periodically find an opening and jolt the person of Mr. Beasley in a manner most obnoxious to his views of happiness. Meanwhile, among the watching seamen rose a hum of admiration for their champion; and not exactly admiration, either, but adoration; and had the fight stopped then and there Mr. Morson-Brown might have asked for their very trouser lacings—and had them too. But the battle was not yet done.

The mate was now retreating before a swirl of blows, and wore a troubled look; still he was game, and fought back with all his brutal strength and a species of brutal science which was his; then a strange thing happened. Morson-Brown had been boring in and striking quickly, as quickly as a wasp, but now his left fist moved across his opponent's guard in a slow, peculiar twist, landing with a soft, faint pat on the point of Beasley's chin.

As Valda expressed it, "it seemed a very feeble lick indeed," yet amazing results attended it. The big mate's arms sank weakly to his sides, while over his features stole an

expression of beatific idiocy. Why not? To his ears came floating the strains of various seraphic bands; brass bands—string bands—bands of mellifluous cherubims. They ravished his senses, tickled his fancy with the joy of some heavenly joke; so he stood there, swaying, grinning, till his legs caved under him—then the mate went down like a butchered bull.

From the crew rose a deferential, half-strangled cheer. Mr. Tracy—probably from force of habit—began to count very slowly, up to ten; then he sighed a sigh of peace.

“Out, by God!” he breathed, in simple, soulful appreciation of a worthy deed.

“Is he dead?” asked Valda, shuddering as she clutched the rail; but the victor calmly reassured her:

“Oh, no; he’ll be all right in a minute. Don’t worry, please. A bucket or two of sea water is all he needs, and his shipmates will attend to that.”

This was partly a mistake. The shipmates did attend to it; but it required seven buckets of sea water instead of two; then Beasley came back into the world and sat up. His conqueror bent over him.

“Beasley,” he said, in a not unkindly tone, “you may be curious to know what happened. I’ll tell you. It was a left ‘grapevine’ to the

point of your vulgar jaw. The next time it will be a right swing, and when it *does* happen, may the good Lord help you!"

The mate made no reply. His shipmates assisted him in a leisurely progress to the seclusion of his own cabin, and disappeared as silently as they had come. The other spectators likewise took a discreet departure, leaving the mistress of the Spitfire and the champion quite alone.

Now it might have been expected that between these two would follow an understanding as to their future attitudes, respectively; yet the strange contrariness of human nature willed otherwise. From one point of view, Mr. Morson-Brown had gone far to regain his forfeited position in the good graces of Miss Girard, and a careful nursing of that convalescent state might bring about a very healthy happiness; but now he deliberately spoiled it all by an idiotic speech which caused an instantaneous relapse. He looked up at her, with a glow of pride and triumph on his handsome face—yes, and with something else—a something which no rational, full-blooded woman could misconstrue with her eyes and heart.

"Miss Girard," he said, "for what you have done for me, I can find no words to thank you. In other circumstances *I'd love you for it!*"

CHAPTER XII

THE RESULTS OF A KNOCKOUT

IT is wrong, no doubt, to undignify a chapter by such a heading; but what if the caption fits? Various women, since this funny old world began, have lost their hearts to men in ways too strange and manifold to classify or count. Some have lost their hearts in the flick of a lash, as it were, while others required a score of years to give their all. Some have divided out Dan Cupid's merchandise to as many as four husbands in quick succession; others less enterprising have remained single and eaten their hearts out. Many have had their hearts worn out, worked out, nagged out; but few, it is pleasant to state, have had them knocked out.

At any rate the losing of Miss Valda's heart may be placed in the category of this rare exception, though to her credit be it said she did not know it. Moreover, she refused pointblank to admit the faintest possibility of such a loss, even to herself, and especially to Mr. Morson-Brown.

When that gentleman delivered his unfortunate remark relative to loving her in other circumstances, she had crushed him with a glance and turned on her heel; or, to be more exact, she had *tried* to crush him with a glance, and turned on her heel. This difference is occasioned by the fact that he possessed a peculiar disposition which positively refused to be crushed under any condition, no matter what weight of dignity and scorn was brought to bear. In this instance, he returned to his burdensome task of holy-stoning the Spitfire's decks, and enlivened his labors by beginning to whistle merrily. He was actually whistling! Valda heard him! Therefore, with the vindictive intention of interfering with his absurd happiness, she gave orders that the privilege of holy-stoning should be taken away from him immediately.

She neither saw nor spoke to him throughout the entire day, and for two reasons. First, she did not intend to see or speak to him ever again as long as she lived; second, she was deeply, most sincerely, mortified. Naturally, Mr. Morson-Brown, in his propensity for fighting people on her yacht, had brought about this distressing state of mind.

Now that the excitement of battle was over, she had time to think, and her thoughts were

not pleasant ones; indeed, they were quite the reverse, falling little short of perfect self-disgust. It was all very well for ladies of ancient Rome, or other untaught barbarians, to sit calmly down, expressing approval with their thumbs, while men made brutes of themselves; but this was different. These antiquated ladies most probably enjoyed a fight from an innocent and purely artistic point of view. They lived according to their lights; but their lights were not electric. What, then, of a lady of the twentieth century, born and bred amid culture and refinement—a lady who not only watched a brutal fight, but had practically started it by giving her sanction to the pugilists? Yes, that was a different matter!

In vain she strove to excuse her act on the grounds of justice, on the grounds of Christian sympathy for a man who had subdued his own proud spirit because of her. The fact remained that she had forgotten her duty to society at large by failing to uphold its principles of morality and peace. She had winked at rowdyism. She had become *particeps criminis* to brawling and disorderly conduct; therefore, she had lost her right, in its strictest sense, to be called a lady!

In vain did the ghosts of old Oliver Cromwell and the venerable judge come back to claim a

share in the disgraceful bout. These gentlemen were unacquainted with modern customs; and modern customs were—oh, so different! Why different, it was difficult to say; so she sought for a simile and came upon a poser in a bathing suit. It was eminently proper for any dignified young lady to sprawl upon a sea-beach, bedecked in a nine-inch skirt and becoming hose; yet the same young lady would die of shame if forced to thus array herself for the apish gaze of her guests in a drawing-room.

It was ridiculous when analyzed; but modern customs were never intended for analysis. They were like faith; one had to have it, whether reasonable or not, and must swallow it, no matter how it tasted. Yes, it was just custom; and custom was crazy, anyway—as crazy as a cat that insists on licking itself all over and all day long instead of merely swimming across a creek.

So Valda gave up reasoning again, submitting her conscience to the raw conviction of having been debased. She had degraded herself in the eyes of her entire crew, who now would look upon her with vastly less respect than formerly. They would whisper when she passed! They would speak her name lightly among themselves—a name which, alas! had tumbled from a pinnacle!

This was a mistake. Her crew—like the barbarous ladies of ancient Rome—enjoyed a “scrap” from a purely artistic point of view; and, had Valda only known it, they toasted her name in smuggled rye, with three subdued cheers and a tiger. As for their standard of a modern lady, it was pronounced, though weird. As for respect to the mistress of the Spitfire, they rendered it up in buckets, and were willing and eager to holy-stone her very footprints with the tips of their reverential noses. Why not? It was human nature; crude, but human nature, after all. Had Beasley conquered, it might have been different; but Beasley hadn’t, and the hearts of the crew were glad. Brown was the victor! Miss Valda Girard—God bless her for a lady and a saint!—was a victor, too. Therefore, the humble seamen set them both on high, and loved them—from a distance.

It was custom—just custom; and custom is kind to victors, whether they win an actual *bona-fide* battle, or smash a few dilapidated tubs in a land-locked bay.

Valda did not know all this, and her heart was most unhappy. Besides, she was obsessed with an aching restlessness which she could not for the life of her define. In days gone by the yacht had seemed a home to her, every part of

it. She could loll for hours upon the deck with a book or fancywork, or chat for half a day with Captain Joe in the pilot-house, listening to the old salt's variegated yarns of the vasty deep; but now the yacht had become a prison. She longed to leave it instantly—to fly away, away off somewhere—she didn't know exactly where—then hurry back again. She wanted freedom, action! The roll of the boat was a mad monotony; the pulse of its engines had become a throbbing curse! She hated that yacht as she hated nothing else on earth, with the two exceptions of herself and Mr. Morson-Brown.

After dinner that evening Mr. Ormond sat chatting pleasantly with Aunt Mary and Miss Polly, and the three of them seemed to be having a disgustingly hilarious time. Clearly, they did not care for the gloomy society of Miss Girard, so that high-minded lady left them to their own devices. On the plea of diversion, she tried to talk to Mr. Tracy; but the private secretary was so religiously following out the ethical suggestion of keeping his damned mouth shut, that the experiment proved a flat failure. Valda sighed hopelessly, and went to bed.

This was an excellent idea. She would lie there comfortably and think it all out in peace and quietness. Bed was the best place for

thought, anyway. One was not distracted by outside influences. And so she began to think. She began systematically, lying flat on her back and staring up into the darkness; but presently the outside influences came creeping in through the portholes, on purpose to annoy her. In order to dispel them, she began to think violently, and the process was very human, if not entirely satisfactory. She kicked her bed clothes into tangled, disordered knots, twisting them under and over and around her body, as if she would wrench her consolation from a reverie; then the outside influences jumped down from the portholes and sat on her head.

To begin with, she was angry with Mr. Morson. No—Brown! She was angry with Brown! How dared he speak to her of love—this common prizefighter! this slim, clean athlete who had snuffed the candle of his pride and bowed to her in—no, that was Mr. Morson!

Somehow, she seemed to separate the two, in the sacredly accepted manner of sheep and goats, giving to each his share of honor or contempt, with an amiable shepherd's eye to appropriate segregation.

At any rate, how dared he speak to her at all? To think of his presumption in thanking *her* for the privilege of fighting—setting the responsibility—all of it—upon her shoulders!

How dared he say *that in other circumstances he would love her for it?* Oh, that was the worst of all! Besides, an absurd little devil kept whispering in her ear, circumstance was *not* a barrier to love!

He had grossly insulted her, this man; but what a battle he had made! She closed her eyes to shut him from her memory, then closed the windows of her conscience tight, and once more watched him fight for a prize of pride. She could see his brown arms working like a serpent's tongue, the poise of his leopard's body as it swayed from the path of a brutal blow. She could see his head flung high, in the joy of a warhorse snuffing battle from afar. She could hear the patter of his shifting feet—the smack of his swift, hard fists! She listened again to her own half-strangled cry, and then—he was hanging on the rail! His lips were drawn and quivering! His eyes were turned to her in agony—reproach! But, no! No! No! She mustn't think of that! She mustn't! He had looked so gray—and pitiful! She must think of something else!

If that presumptuous person was really Brown, then Ormond and Tracy were ordinary thieves. Perhaps Brown had taken the name of Brown just to catch them. When they neared New York, they would try to escape in a boat.

They would do it at night. Maybe they would break open the safe and take Mr. Morson's jewels with them. She hadn't thought of that before. It might be a good idea to take those things out herself and hide them somewhere else. Again, if Brown was Morson—which, of course, he wasn't—he might hit everybody on the chin and open the safe himself to get his own property in his own possession. The matter was really worth thinking over—at another time.

It was settled, though, that Ormond and Tracy were ordinary thieves, no matter who might be this other person who persisted in annoying her with his outside influences. He was not satisfied to disturb her peace of mind by whistling at his work, but now he leaned over the rail and dropped his influences through the portholes. It wasn't fair! And why did he bow to her like that? And why did his impish eyes keep peeping at her from the utter darkness? It wasn't fair! In his place she would have thumped Mr. Beasley when she had him down. She tried it, in imagination; but somehow she couldn't strike, because it wasn't fair; so she waited for him to rise, then fought him with her fists—just as Mr. Morson had done—ever so quickly—like the darting of a graceful wasp. But it hurt to be hit under the heart—

it hurt terribly!—and made her feel faint and drowsy and, oh! so sorry for the quivering thing that hung upon the rail. But she mustn't stop fighting; she must go on and on and on, for the sake of pride—even though she knew she must fall at last—just as she was falling now, with the hum of foolish things revolving in her ears. So Valda went to sleep, fighting with Mr. Beasley and her bed clothes.

She knew she was dreaming; but what of that? She would think right on in the middle of outside influences. She would begin from the first—the first of everything—when a beautiful devil came up out of the sea and bowed to her. He wasn't a very honorable devil, though, for he told her flippant lies and said his name was something else. But when she stormed at him, he only laughed, crinkling up his eyes and showing his abominably even teeth. When she tried to shame him, he called her a spitfire, and said it over and over and over until there was no sense in it, and made her angry; then he ran away and she couldn't find him, though she looked for him everywhere.

Polly was hunting for him, too, vowing to marry him at once, just because his hair curled up over his ears; so Valda made her sit in a coal-shovel, and pitched her into a saucy little tugboat that was passing by. Then, while she

was laughing at the smut marks on Polly's petticoat, Mr. Morson came back and got himself all mixed up in her father's gem collection, which he said was smuggled and that he must take it back to England for the sake of duty. There was something funny about this; so she laughed—not because it *was* funny, but because he *told* her it was funny—which was silly and childish, even in a dream.

Mr. Ormond and Mr. Tracy argued about it with her and made her come to dinner, where they slipped the table silver into their coat-pockets; but she knew they were thieves, because she had said so from the very first. Then they blew out the lights and went away to talk with the poet Keats. She hadn't seen this gentleman on board before; but perhaps he was a friend of Aunt Mary or Captain Joe. She didn't care which, though; so she tried not to think about it, and went in search of outside influences.

She found him on his knees in the main saloon, opening the safe, which he did without even trying scarcely, and took her father's gem collection. He said *he* was not a thief, because the jewels really belonged to a Sheik or something; but when she tried to take them from him, he laughed at her, and dropped them down the smokestack. So she called to Mr. Beasley,

and the mate came running up the ladder and hit him with a holy-stone.

Mr. Morson fought with him—in a cotton undershirt—and beat him all to pieces; then he climbed to the upper deck and told her he would love her in *any* circumstances. He had no business saying that, and she told him he was a presumptuous lunatic; but he only grinned and took her in his strong, brown arms. She struggled with him, though, as hard as ever she could; but he drew her close to him and looked into her eyes with his impish gray ones—and then he kissed her. Oh, how dared he! To kiss her! To kiss her on the lips! It thrilled her with a nameless, lingering delight—and made her perfectly furious!

She *told* him she was furious; but he chuckled and sang foolish things at her, just as if she were a little foreign baby; then he dived into the sea; so she cried because he had gone away. But she stopped crying, almost instantly, for he came back, dripping, and said he had been playing poker—which was another flippant lie. Mr. Beasley knew it was a lie, and began to fight with him again, round and round like children who hold each other's hands and spin till their little heads are dizzy; and Valda helped the mate, because this man was Mr. George C. Brown who had come to hurt her father.

It was terribly easy, this fighting in a dream; but it didn't seem exactly fair; so she hit Mr. Brown as lightly as she could. Her little white fist went out—slowly—as slowly as a spider crawls—and touched him under the heart; but he lurched against the rail and hung there, limp and quivering, by his arms.

Again she cried out—cried out in the mother-pity of it—and Aunt Mary (she was a very gentle old Aunt Mary, by the way) came in and smoothed the bed clothes and gave her a sleeping powder. Valda hated sleeping powders; but she didn't mind this one, because it made her rest and forget to think. It was so nice to lie still again and feel the tangles straightening out at last, to hear the nagging voices growing less and less, to know that outside influences were rather restful, after all.

Then Mr. Morson came in and sat beside her and held her hand—tenderly—just as he had held his father's hand in the hut on the river bank. He told her he loved her more than a million emeralds—loved her as he loved the memory of his dead; for to him she was a holy thing, even if she was a spitfire. She wanted to be furious with him; but he laughed and kissed her fury all away, for it was tiresome to stay angry *all* the time. Besides, it was so, so sweet for this big, brown boy to be sitting

there beside her on the bed. It wasn't quite proper, though, but her own mother was there, too, and said it was all right; so Valda knew, of course, that it *was* all right, and went to sleep and didn't dream any more.

Perhaps the spirit of her mother made her sleep, promising to tell her many things which she did not know—to tell her she had lost something, and would never want to ask it back again—that a beautiful devil had come up out of the sea, to steal the choicest gem which her father owned. She did not know that in those few, fleet moments when the thief hung, gray and helpless, to the rail, he had done far more to filch her love than by the passionate pleadings of a hundred tongues.

A man had come knocking at the gates of her woman's heart, and the gates were opened—just a little way. Then the man came knocking at the gates of her mother-heart—and the gates were opened wide.

CHAPTER XIII

FRAGMENTS

IT is excusable, no doubt, and highly probable that any young lady might be foolish enough to open gates in a silly, disjointed dream; but, in broad daylight, while standing in her fighting shoes, Miss Valda Girard felt entirely competent to slam those gates in the face of Mr. Morson-Brown. She did it—locking them with the key of dignity, barring them by a flat withdrawal from his presence of her own most attractive person. If he chose to howl on the outside—let him!

This chuckling upstart might amuse himself *by* himself, or among his own associates and admirers in the sailors' quarters; but if he imagined that as long as he lived he would ever again have another chance to come chuckling around *her*—well, just let him try it! As for holding hands and having her hunting all over the whole yacht for *him*—well, Miggs must have served a most remarkable dinner, indeed!

Therefore, considering all things, Miss Valda Girard became absorbed in games of solitaire

on the stern deck; but she wearied of it in half an hour and began to try her fortune. She tried it over eleven times, and was perfectly disgusted by the impertinent persistency of the king of hearts.

She reasoned this out, however, and triumphed in the conclusion that a jack of clubs would be far more significant of a certain person's moral character. Thereafter, she became deeply, strangely interested to note how a jack — with the ease of dream-fighting — could brazenly usurp a throne.

It was now the evening of the 18th of September, and in another day and another night, at least, the Spitfire must be in a position to cruise off Sandy Hook and fly her private signals, in accordance with instructions. Orders were orders, and in obedience thereto the yacht nosed swiftly on her way, to the kick of her double expansion engines, while the stoking gentlemen continued to shovel coal and to wonder why the Lord had ever predestined them to such a relentless, grimy trade.

The ministerial Miggs was pondering, too. In a little pantry place, just off the galley, he was gazing through a porthole at the rising moon, and his thoughts were sad. To him it

seemed that life consisted of a vast, round, fiery hoop of hot plates. No sooner was one set cleared away and washed than another set must occupy his weary mind—and why? Because some people were rich and some were not. Because the rich ones thought of nothing under Heaven beyond one endless cycle of meals, while a poor, poor steward was forced to serve them up, just as a millwheel fools itself with the vain belief that each bucket of water dumped will be the last.

“An’ wot *drives* that w’eeel?” asked Miggs of the rising moon. “Money! Money’s wot does it, an’ if ever *I* get rich, I’ll ‘ire me a ‘undred stooards, an’ watch ‘em bu’st their bleedin’ ‘earts by carryin’ of red ‘ot plates, b’Gawd!”

And the moon said nothing whatever.

Aunt Mary stood in the doorway of the main saloon, and her mind was troubled—just a little at first, but not very much. She had seen Miss Polly Thurman creep stealthily out on deck, place a package in the hand of Mr. Morson, who was there on watch, then creep stealthily back again. Aunt Mary went in to ask that young lady certain pointed questions, and, strangely, found the young lady fast asleep.

In her delicate capacity of chaperon, Aunt

Mary considered a thousand foolish possibilities. The main saloon connected with the dining-room, the galley, and the ladies' sleeping quarters. It had only two exits, one in a passage directly opposite her own stateroom, which was now locked; the other being the doorway in which she now stood. This door was usually left open at night, yet the wise old chaperon conceived the advisability of locking it and pocketing the key; but, when she went to do so, the key was gone.

The chaperon went in again to Miss Polly Thurman's stateroom, awoke her ruthlessly, and formulated certain direct and searching inquiries which smacked of the "third degree;" then, for half an hour, more or less, an old maid wept on a young maid's dimpled shoulder.

Now, whatever was revealed in this touching interview, it was not imparted to the mistress of the *Spitfire*; for Aunt Mary—alas!—was in open mutiny. She turned her placid back on the path of rectitude, stole once again to the open doorway of the main saloon, and, like the ministerial *Miggs*, gazed out across the sea at a rising moon—though she did not see the moon.

She looked beyond, to the land of dreams, where a beautiful devil in years gone by had risen from out her sea—and bowed. He had

bowed—ah, God!—and, in bowing, winked away into the Great Unknown. A wonderful land was that Great Unknown—a land where her lover was never old and gray, like the gray old maid who dreamed, but was always beautiful—and young.

Mr. Morson-Brown was winding up his watch. This statement may seem a trifle misleading to any but a nautical understanding, for the gentleman's timepiece, together with certain gems, were, by his own claim, in the possession of Ormond; therefore, the only watch he had was a four hours' watch on deck, and this was coming to a close.

He too was gazing at the moon—as seems to be the fixed habit among impressionable young people in a state of temporary aberration—but just what his thoughts were depends somewhat upon the question as to whether he was really Bruce Morson, or George C. Brown, or Professor Jonah, Jr., or any, in fact, of a dozen other aliases. Most certainly, though, he was one of them, and if you want to know positively about it, you can, of course, be silly and turn over to the end of the book.

From what we have already seen, however, it might be reasonably presumed that the scamp's sentiments toward Miss Valda Girard

could be fully emphasized in that nautical and expressively splashy phrase, "Man overboard!" Yet, at this particular juncture (though we break the news as gently as possible) he was thinking, and earnestly too, of another woman.

In one hand he held a hurriedly scrawled note which he had just deciphered by the light of the starboard lantern; in the other he gripped a small package—a package about two and a half inches long and seeming hard to the touch.

"Bully little Polly!" he murmured to himself gently, tenderly, as he looked through a rising mist toward the moon. "*In other circumstances I'd love her for it!*"

Mr. Beasley, in the seclusion of his own cabin, was not gazing at the moon. He was studying physical geography in a looking-glass, and the scenery therein reflected was a trifle wild and uncultivated. True, a harrow might seem to have passed over certain portions of its area; but the mate was scarcely in a frame of mind to appreciate such similes.

This countenance, worn by some one else, would have appealed to him as being positively humorous, for it had a twisted look of inquiry, similar to the expression of a deformed mush-

room; but, being strictly his own possession, he saw nothing funny in it whatever. Indeed, he took it seriously. He applied raw beefsteak to it, and several other efficacious substances and lotions, together with bits of court plaster which he adjusted in tender solicitude.

Now the average martyr, in a parallel employment, finds a balm of relief in muttering, yet the mate refrained. He had discovered, by experiment, that muttering caused a movement of the lower jaw; and, if there was one portion of his sore anatomy which needed complete rest and inactivity, that part was the part immediately affected by a left hand "grapevine."

Therefore, Beasley ministered to his hurts in silence, expressing the yearnings of his soul in reflected glares; and, were we wise enough to interpret them, we would know that Morson-Brown was held in rather poor esteem. To be exact, the mate longed earnestly to deprive that Southern aristocrat of health and wealth and happiness, to say nothing of his privilege of swaggering about this terrestrial globe.

If people talk long enough, it gets late; and we ourselves have been doing quite enough of it to affect time seriously. Be that as it may, the Spitfire's company had long since settled down to peaceful sleep; that is to say, all but

those who were paid salaries for remaining awake, or others whose insomnia arose from purely private reasons.

The main saloon was lighted by a handsome brass ship's-lantern attached to a beam and swinging gently to the Spitfire's roll. To-night its oil was low, and presently the flame grew weak and faint, to flicker and die with one last smelly whiff of smoke; yet the rising moon rose higher still and peeped from time to time into the room, like a thief, for it peeped in through a transom. Its light was not a steady light; for as the vessel rolled this transom sneaked away from the line of radiance, then settled back again, leaving the main saloon now dark, now faintly bright with a pale and ghostly glow.

One specially frivolous little moonbeam began a tour of impertinent investigation, settling on polished objects, such as brasswork, door locks, or the rosewood paneling, and selected finally a metal dial with numbers on it. Here the moonbeam rested, flirting with it, retreating coyly, then edging back again, as the Spitfire rose and fell to the ocean's heave. Thus the foolish game went on and on, till the dial seemed almost like a grim little human eye that was winking at the frailties of human nature.

It was a very peaceful night indeed. Even the machinery seemed to snore less audibly than was its wont, and the foam from the bow slid past with a drowsy sigh. The Spitfire hummed her vibratory chant in melodious monotony, and those who were innocent wandered through the fields of dreams.

Suddenly, in the half-light, appeared a half-ghostly figure. It was tall and slender, cloaked in a long gray dressing gown, with a collar which muffled its guilty head. It came noiselessly, in its stocking feet, pausing at every step to listen. It peered from left to right, from right to left, searching each shadowy corner for a lurking foe; but its face was always turned away from the frivolous little moon-beam that came a-flirting through the transom.

It is difficult to say how tall this figure was; for it stooped as it crept along, and presently it paused and knelt before the little metal dial with numbers on it. Twice it started at suspicious sounds, crouching among the shadows on the floor; but it rose to its knees again and began to turn the polished disk with eager, nervous fingers.

So strange and vague this prowling specter seemed, that it might have been part of a dream of some one who had dined too well; yet, presently, while the main saloon was dark, it rose

and slipped away as silently as it first appeared. Then the frivolous little moonbeam once more came flirting through the transom, and the little round metal eye took up its winking most facetiously.

It is funny how this chapter seems to run to eyes; but the fault is neither yours nor mine. People had a way of *looking* at things, whether those things were moons or mirrors or dreamlands or nothing in particular. There was Captain Joe, for instance. He was at the wheel in the pilot-house, looking straight ahead into the night, in order, he claimed, not to run into anything big or hard or otherwise disagreeable. But Captain Joe *saw* something.

Away off on the weather quarter he saw a flashlight. There was, of course, nothing remarkable in the bare fact; but, in Captain Joe's opinion, this was about the most industrious and over-anxious flashlight of which his nautical experience had ever run afoul. It beat the sea in circles; it shot its blazing glance at every mark that floated on the sea; it peered into the clouds, then jumped suddenly, as if it thought somebody was creeping up behind it, then began to thrash about again.

"Hell!" mused Captain Joe, in a tone of heartfelt sympathy. "I guess that fellow must have lost his pocketbook."

If anything was lost, however, something soon was found, for the glaring, inquisitive eye of light popped full upon the Spitfire, lingered an instant, disappeared, came back again in a steady stare of boorish impoliteness, and then went out for good.

This lack of breeding was none of Captain Joe's affair, so he kept straight on in obedience of his sailing orders; but, chancing to glance once more across the moonlit waters, he was conscious of the fact that a big black yacht, erupting thick black smoke and showers of sparks, was tearing after him.

"Hell!" he mused again. "Now maybe *I'm* the fellow's pocketbook."

While dwelling on the subject of eyes, it might be well to state that two other pairs were deeply interested in the eye of light that came winking across the waters. Just why these orbs were not fast closed in innocent sleep at this late hour of night is rather difficult to say; but they belonged respectively to Ormond and his private secretary and were framed attractively in two respective portholes.

"Jim," observed one of the owners of the eyes, in guarded tones, "if your friend Girard happens to be working that bull's-eye lantern over yonder, and he happens to come on board



**Captain Joe Saw Something Away Off on the
Weather Quarter**

and happens to fall to the song and dance of that scrapper, George C. Brown—well, I wouldn't give a bag of beans——”

“Tracy,” said his mortal mentor, with an air of patient suffering, “will you keep your damned mouth shut?”

“Sure,” returned the accommodating secretary. “It's your deal, Jim, and no mistake; but I'd like darn well to cut the deck.”

“Which deck?” asked his superior sharply.

The incongruous Mr. Tracy shrugged his shoulders.

CHAPTER XIV

LOOKING BACKWARD

MR. MARCUS GIRARD had just returned to London in a frame of mind which proved his daughter's right by direct inheritance to the title of spitfire. This effervescent brainstorm was caused by the following reasons:

He had been closeted for many hours with several financial magnates in Liverpool, and the interview resembled certain fizzy, spluttery fireworks. The three financial magnates had previously made verbal pledges to support a large American enterprise in Canadian timber lands, agreeing to furnish the capital at a moderate rate of interest plus a specified number of shares of stock. Mr. Girard, relying upon these verbal promises, had pledged himself by cable to become sponsor for the deal; then something happened. The American market became depressed, refusing to be aroused therefrom, even by Christian Science or osteopathy. The English market suffered a corresponding fall in spirits, languishing in sulky

gloom until such a time as her sister gambler should perk up and begin to take notice. Mr. Marcus Girard was a man who kept his promises regardless of a market's rise or fall. The three magnates of Liverpool held that a money stringency vitiated unwritten contracts, or subjected such contracts to an advanced rate of interest and a greater number of shares. Mr. Girard, at first, endeavored to explain the situation from a humorous point of view; but, naturally, the Englishmen failed to see it. The American then explained his personal opinions of them, without humor, and hurried back to London.

His position was a trying one. This failure on the part of the Liverpool money kings to back their promises with cash placed a heavy burden on his own shoulders, and of late his financial affairs had become a couch of thorns. True, before going to Liverpool, he had seen the trouble brewing in the morning paper, and his subsequent conference with the unhumorous Liverpoolians was merely a proof of his own prophecy; still, the reality put him in a boiling rage.

It was now necessary for him to reach his base of operations in New York at the earliest possible moment; so he at once engaged passage on the *Lusitania*, which would leave on the fol-

lowing morning, intending to order the Spitfire to follow him at leisure. This, in his opinion, was the best arrangement, anyway; for in the stress of delicate business complications, his brains would not be addled by the magpie chatter of Polly Thurman and the irritating serenity of Aunt Mary.

However, there was much to be done before departure, and he was short on time and long on fermenting rage; thus, in an unenviable mental state, he returned to his hotel in London, burst into his apartments, and roared for Torkins. The valet did not appear, and the master was answered only by the echoes of his own roarings and the voice of a petulant guest in the next room who hammered on the wall and told him to shut up.

This was scarcely what the old gentleman needed to quiet him. For a moment he contemplated charging through the wall and hurling the petulant one out of the window, but fortunately remembered that he was pressed for time. He must pack his valises, have them sent on board the Lusitania, then hunt up several London capitalists in the hope—the very slim hope—of raising funds for his deal in Canadian timber lands. For the present, though, he strove to put finances out of his mind, and began to pack.

His method was simple but effective. He raged from place to place, cramming his belongings into two large leather cases as though they were wine-presses. When a piece of furniture got in his way, he kicked it into a position which barricaded his progress on the next trip, fell over it, and went on packing. Suddenly he stopped short and took a swift, savage inventory of his personal effects. The result was a large balance on the debit side, not to mention the further loss of self-control.

For an instant it seemed that Marcus Girard had swollen just a fraction beyond the bursting-point; but he contracted quickly and began to work his business head, which was cold, clear, and searching. Many articles of value were missing, including clothing, small change, two unopened boxes of cigars, and a highly prized Morocco cigar-case presented to him by his daughter on his last birthday.

That Torkins was directly responsible, there was not the smallest doubt. The valet's absence proved it. As to motive, there was Mr. Girard's own low quarter shoe and a certain afflicted nose. The whole thing was as simple as fleecing a lamb in Wall Street. Still there must have been additional reasons for this criminal conduct on the part of a servant; so the old gentleman looked for it carefully, and

came upon a clue. In the window sill were several bits of torn paper, evidently thrown out in a hurry, and in one corner lay a crumpled little yellow ball. This, on being unfolded, proved to be a telegram, and read as follows:

MARCUS GIRARD,

Hotel Victoria, London, Eng.

Gumshoe—grasshopper—second class—stew orders at once—
tobacco.

V. G.

Now, to the average mind, this telegram would seem to be an urgent message to the proprietor of a Chinese restaurant, ordering a hurried meal for a suicide club; but the mind of Marcus Girard was above the average. He rummaged through his pockets, failing to come upon the object of his search; then he rummaged through various pockets in the clothing which had been left at the Victoria, and finally produced a little red book marked "Cipher Code." He referred again to the mysterious telegram, hunting up each word in the code book and setting it down with a pencil. Presently he produced the following:

Cipher message—to leave in hurry—not understood—explain at once—will wait.

VALDA GIRARD.

Valda's father sat for five minutes with his head in his hands; then he ran downstairs and bellowed for a cab. The cab took him to the nearest telegraph station, and here fortune

favored him—for a time. He was personally known to the manager, who produced copies of several messages which had been despatched earlier in the day in the name of Marcus Girard. The old gentleman read with astonishment a telegram to a James Ormond, giving that unknown person full charge of his private yacht. He read, with greater astonishment, another message introducing said Ormond to his daughter, and still another to Captain Larris, ordering him to reach Sandy Hook by the twentieth. Finally the dazed financier came upon the answer to Valda's gumshoe-grasshopper inquiry, which, being translated, read as follows:

Don't be an idiot! Do as I tell you!

The telegraph manager found a seat for Mr. Girard and gave him a glass of Scotch whisky. It was now fifteen minutes past three in the afternoon. Presently a key began to gibber at certain officials in Calais. The officials gibbered back to the effect that the Spitfire was in port, but had just weighed anchor, and was at that moment about to clear the end of the mole. An urgent request was flashed over the wire to stop the yacht at any cost; then came a long and harrowing silence.

As previously stated in the early part of this story, a series of little flags were run up on

the staff of the signal station; but the hurrying yacht had disregarded this official command to tarry. Also, it had paid no attention whatever to a fussy little French official who had come tearing down the quay, frantically waving his uniformed arms. It was not stated, however, that this same official, in his French excitement, had tumbled into the water, or that his heroic rescue had occasioned more excitement and a corresponding French delay; yet such was the lamentable case. Meanwhile, Mr. Marcus Girard cooked himself to a cinder of impatience, and by the time coherent tidings of the Spitfire did reach him, that saucy craft was kicking up her heels in the dim distance.

There was no boat at Calais which could catch the Spitfire, even in ordinary circumstances, and now the proposition was rendered still more hopeless when Mr. Girard recalled a characteristic phrase in the sailing orders to Captain Joe:

Drive her as hard as hell will let you!

He knew Captain Joe, and he knew the possibilities of such a verbal tonic; therefore he shocked the female operators in the telegraph station, and went away.

It was perfectly clear to him that Torkins was in collusion with some thief or murderer by the name of James Ormond. The valet was

acquainted with his master's eccentricities, his mode of life, and the existence of the little red cipher book. The rest was easy; but what the devil, he asked himself, should any rational thief want with a yacht containing Polly Thurman and Aunt Mary? Mr. Girard knew a good deal about thieves, and for a time the problem troubled him. A thousand conjectures rose up and butted him in the business forehead; but each was dismissed as being too absurd for serious consideration. One, however, stuck. It was rather a shrewd guess, and was expressed with conviction and finality:

“Somebody wants to get out of the country—and get out quick. It’s a long-headed way of hurrying, by George! But think of the damned impudence of it!”

At first blush the owner of the Spitfire thought of chartering a part of the English navy for pursuit; but he knew something of English red tape; besides, money was tight. No, he must work his business head to better and more economical advantage. The Lusitania, on which he had booked his passage, was scheduled to reach New York on the seventeenth. The Spitfire, according to the despatch sent Captain Joe, would make Sandy Hook by the twentieth, then cruise about and fly private signals. Thus, Mr. Girard had the advantage

of three days, and, even if his steamer did not sight the Spitfire on her way over, he could run out of New York on another craft and watch for his yacht as it came in.

He did not lose sight of the fact that these very telegrams might have been worded with an object of sending him on a false trail, or that the whole maneuver might be planned by a financial shark as a blind for some wildcat operation in which the absence of one Marcus Girard would be worth that fleshy gentleman's weight in railroad bonds.

He considered the matter carefully, in its every light, just as was his custom to consider a probable rise or fall in stocks; but, unlike his daughter, he did not do the opposite. When he made up his mind, he went straight ahead, and when obstacles arose he either climbed over or bucked through. In this particular instance he had arrived upon two conclusions: first, that the ladies were in no bodily danger from a man merely trying to escape from England; second, that some very pretty little game was on foot, and that Marcus Girard was in a fair position to nip it before it bloomed.

Having settled the matter as far as was possible until the twentieth of the month, he finished packing and had his valises sent on board his steamer; then he hunted up several London

financiers in the hope of raising funds, and was turned down—hard. Whereupon, the sorely beset old gentleman cursed England to the limit of his linguistic proficiency and followed his valises.

At eight o'clock next morning the Lusitania was warped out of her dock at Liverpool, and headed for New York. Mr. Girard did two things. He interviewed the Captain, causing lookouts to be posted night and day to watch for the Spitfire; then he tipped the chief engineer. The first precaution was productive of no result; the second proved a benefit to two persons—the chief engineer himself and the warty little Israelite who drew the highest number in the pool. After this Mr. Girard took to pacing the decks in utter solitude, and was voted a beast by two hundred and eighty passengers.

On reaching New York he immediately raised his requisite funds, at a mortifying money rate, closed his Canadian deal, then took off his coat, so to speak, and got into the other little game. It needed cash and influence. He borrowed a big black yacht from a business acquaintance by the name of Morgan—the yacht being called the Horsehair, or something as near as possible to that name without infringing upon the laws of copyright.

Of one fact Mr. Girard was thoroughly convinced. If anything unusual was going to happen on board the Spitfire, it would happen in the immediate vicinity of Sandy Hook; therefore, he would stack his chips and throw in a few white ones before the Hook was reached. So, with this logical aim in view, the Horsehair went swaggering down the bay, followed by six business looking little tugboats, the entire flotilla being equipped with searchlights, signal rockets, and such other paraphernalia as are usually employed in a nautical still hunt; then they ran out to sea for a hundred miles or so and spread themselves after the manner of a harbor chain in times of war. By day, with the aid of marine glasses, they picked up everything from a catboat to the battleship Oregon, and by night their searchlights created doubts in the minds of all wandering craft concerning the seekers' sanity.

On the night of the eighteenth, at a certain number of bells—it doesn't matter a particle just *how* many—an officer of the Horsehair aroused Mr. Marcus Girard from his slumbers to report success on the starboard quarter. The sly old bird came out on deck in his pajamas—and smiled.

CHAPTER XV

LOOKING FORWARD

THE big black yacht tore along after the white one, until it came within easy hailing distance, then a fleshy gentleman in a suit of blue and white pajamas called cautiously across the waters:

“Spitfire, ahoy! Is that you, Larris?”

The astonished Captain recognized the owner's hail, and returned an equally guarded answer, while his sigh of personal satisfaction was comparable to that of escaping steam.

“All right,” came the voice again. “Half speed and straight ahead. I'm coming aboard!”

The two yachts were eased down without undue commotion, while the Horsehair edged up gently and pushed a light bridge to the break in the Spitfire's rail. Mr. Girard stepped upon it, with his clothes on his arm; but turned to give a final order to the borrowed Captain.

“Thanks, Harley! Just work along behind us in shouting distance, if you please. I may need you!”

He crossed the bridge, and was met by Beasley, who had just turned out to relieve his superior officer at the wheel.

“And who are *you*?” demanded the scant-clad owner sharply.

“I’m Beasley, sir,” returned the afflicted mate, using his lower jaw with difficulty.

“You’re a liar!” said Mr. Girard, with simplicity and warmth. “I never saw you before since I was born!”

The mate hastened to explain that his facial strangeness was due to an accident. Mr. Girard snorted and went to Captain Joe in the pilot-house.

“Send for Torkins,” he ordered, while he began to array himself a bit more conventionally in trousers. The Captain stared at him in open-mouthed wonder.

“Torkins, sir?” he asked blankly. “Torkins?”

“Yes, Torkins!” snapped the old gentleman, balancing himself on one leg and thrusting the other into his trousers viciously. “Not the angel Gabriel, but just plain Torkins! What the h—— Ah! Isn’t the skunk on board?”

“No, sir,” answered Captain Joe, “he isn’t. What’s more, I haven’t seen him, sir.”

Mr. Girard eyed the Captain suspiciously, re-

adjusted his disturbed convictions, and nodded slowly.

"Good!" he said. "I mean good for Torkins' skin. Now, let's get down to business."

While Beasley took the wheel the two retired to the Captain's cabin, where they held a consultation for an hour, going over all such detail as Captain Joe could furnish.

"All right, Larris," said Mr. Girard, as he rose at last. "Just set a double watch on deck, and arm them. If any one of the three rascals tries to sneak over the side, put a hole in him! I mean it! Good-night."

He did mean it. In all matters of business Mr. Girard's methods were clean-cut and incisive. This particular matter was a business one. Captain Joe had given him a good deal of information, but much was lacking; therefore, the business man wasted little time in going after it. He entered the main saloon, passed quickly through the dining cabin, opened the door of his daughter's stateroom, and switched on the electric light. Valda sat up in bed and kissed him dutifully; then, before she even asked him how in the name of Tophet he had got there, she opened up her feminine batteries relative to the sins of smuggling.

Valda talked well—so well that the old gentleman merely sat on the foot of her bed staring

at her, with his chin on his cravat. When she had quite finished, he protested feebly:

“But, my dear child, I never smuggled anything in my whole life—that is, but the two times you mention—and—and, good God, Val, I had forgotten all about the pesky things! You were trying to keep your wicked old dad out of the penitentiary, were you? Well, I’ll be——” He paused to laugh. “Suppose you put on your snaffle, my dear, and we’ll get down to a trot. Now then! What the devil do you make of it, anyway?”

Valda shook her head. Also, her explanation of the tangled events was a trifle unsatisfactory; for it is always difficult to tell a clean-breasted, lucid story and at the same time suppress important fact; but the lady had her reasons. She told of the coming of Ormond and his secretary without reserve, and was greatly relieved on learning of the part which Torkins had played in the beginning of things. This left a clear case against two of the miscreants; still there was a third miscreant to be accounted for, and it was concerning him that the most salient facts were being artfully suppressed. She had never given any of the details of Morson-Brown’s story to Ormond, nor to any one else, in fact; and even to her father she touched upon the incident rather lightly. She

told him merely that the man claimed to have been robbed of his gems in a London hotel, while Mr. Ormond had warned her in advance that the fellow was a sly and slippery customs house official. As for his method of coming on board, she confessed it to be an openly acknowledged trick. Further than this, she was unprepared to offer any information or suggestion.

“U’m!” commented Mr. Girard, working his business head. “I’m inclined to believe the young chap’s version of it may be correct. Come to think of it, I remember reading of some such affair on the morning I went to Liverpool. It’s worth looking into, anyway.” He paused, then looked up suddenly, with a twinkle in his eye. Affairs were brightening now, and he could afford to be a little cheerful. “By the way, my dear, I hear from Captain Joe that you’ve been refereeing a prize-fight. Is that so?”

Valda flushed, but was forced to acknowledge guilt in the mortifying accusation.

“Tell me about it, will you?” asked her father; so Valda picked at her bed clothes and gave as faithful an account of the battle as the mind feminine may grasp and portray, beginning with the ungentlemanly cause and ending with the mate’s expression of pleased idiocy at

receiving a left-hand "grapevine" on the point of his vulgar jaw.

"Bully!" exclaimed her honored parent, his round eyes fairly dancing in his head. "So he put it all over brother Beasley, did he? Holy smoke! I'd like to have seen him. What did you say the young scamp's name is?"

"It—it is either Morson or Brown," she answered, hesitating.

"But which do you *think?*" her father asked. Again Valda hesitated.

"I—I think it's Brown."

The gray old financier laughed.

"And I don't!" he stated with an air of Wall Street conviction. "Bet you a thousand dollars to ten that his name is Morson!"

"I take you," said Valda quietly, with an inherited eye for business odds. "I need some pin money."

The old gentleman chuckled softly, chucked her under the chin, kissed her, and said good-night.

"All right," he answered, referring to his bet, "if I lose I'll pay; but you just keep your eye on dad. There'll be another round or two in the early morning, and somebody's going to holler 'Nuff!' Good-night, Miss Referee!"

He laughed again, but stopped in the middle of it, with his hand on the stateroom door knob:

"Oh! There's another thing. You said you had made that Ormond fellow turn over the property to you. What did you do with it?"

Valda's head went up. Her lips tightened, and she answered in a strange mixture of truth and hesitancy:

"I—well, of course, Dad, I locked it up in the safe. The gems were in your own cigar case."

"Right!" said her father, beaming on her happily, but failing to mark the blush which was creeping from throat to chin, spreading till it reached her ears. "You did the one thing that could block all three of 'em! I'm proud of you!" His smile of appreciation expanded into a grin. "Look here, my dear, I'll tell you what we'll do. Let's clap all three of these scalawags in jail and add the goods to my gem collection. Good idea, eh? Well, you just keep your eye on dad!"

CHAPTER XVI

LOOKING SEVEN WAYS AT ONCE

MR. MARCUS GIRARD awoke at eight-thirty with an uncomfortable start. He had been dreaming that a Mr. Morson had him by the head, while a Mr. Brown had him by the feet, and the two humorous gentlemen were playing seesaw with his dignified person across a pile of railroad bonds.

This unpleasant sensation continued, even after his eyes were open; for when he rolled out of his berth, he continued to roll until his padded proportions became wedged in a corner of the stateroom. He staggered to his feet, opened the stained glass trap of a porthole, and received sixteen quarts of cold salt water full in his face. He swallowed part of it, snorted, and felt that he was now fully awake.

“Damned equinox!” he muttered savagely, as he literally tumbled into his clothes. “Might have known it would look me up, confound its skin!”

In spite of the fact that Mr. Girard had crossed the Atlantic many times, he was not

what might be called a good sailor. Rough weather neither frightened him nor made him seasick; but, as he himself expressed it, "I hate like the devil to climb around my boat by hanging onto things monkey fashion, and I'd rather take my soup by the spoonful than by the lapful."

Having finished a gymnastic toilet, the unhappy old fellow climbed monkey fashion out on deck, to be greeted by a leaden sky, a penetrating wind, and a cross sea, in which the Spitfire was rolling to her scuppers.

"Larris," he asked, loosening his hold on a stanchion and launching himself into that officer's sustaining arms, "how's the glass?"

"That's falling too, sir," returned the Captain deferentially, but with a nautical wink at a scudding seagull. "I'm afraid we are in for a bit of a blow, sir."

"Um, yes," observed the yacht owner grimly, glancing rearward to where the Horsehair was having troubles of her own. "Just drive her, Larris, and we'll get this over as soon as possible."

"It can't be done, sir," apologized the Captain. "You see, sir, the jacket on the tail shaft loosened up a while ago, and I daren't force her. Been running at quarter speed for three hours."

"Horns of the devil!" commented Mr. Girard thoughtfully. "What do you think we'd better do?"

The Captain offered no suggestion for a moment, but eyed the rising sea with intelligent respect.

"Well, sir, it depends on how much time you've got; but if I was the master, I'd lay her nose to the wind and give Jarvis a chance to pack his shaft bearings. It would only take a few hours, sir, and might make it a bit more comfortable for the ladies, who, I take it, are rolling around considerable, sir, without meaning any disrespect."

"Larris," said Mr. Girard, who much preferred having the yacht jounced up and down endwise than to feel it wallowing after the fashion of a colt in a clover field, "do all you can for the comfort of the ladies." He turned to climb his way toward the main saloon; but paused at an afterthought: "By the way, I understand that your two star boarders are occupying my private cabin. Have they turned out yet?"

"No, sir," replied the Captain, striving to suppress a grin. "It's a trifle early for the gentlemen. Any orders, sir?"

Mr. Girard's teeth came together with a snap.

“Yes,” he said, “there are! Have the steward rout those two jailbirds out at once and say they are wanted in the main saloon; but on no account is Miggs to say who wants them. Understand?”

“Perfectly,” returned the Captain, helping the master to climb along the rail. “And asking your pardon, sir, I think I’ll stand by with a capstan bar in case of trouble.”

The yacht owner nodded his appreciation of Captain Joe’s faithfulness to duty, and disappeared through the saloon door with a suddenness somewhat out of keeping with a master’s dignity. Here he found a padded chair in which he anchored himself, and rang for a cup of coffee; not that he needed its sustaining influence, but if there was one thing in the world to be hated above all others, it was the effort of annihilating his fellow beings on an empty stomach.

That Ormond and Tracy were degenerate, thriving scoundrels of the first water, was a foregone conclusion. In the mind of their judge the two culprits were convicted before trial, and their cringings and their prayers for mercy would be but the finishing touches to another little speculation gone wrong. Therefore, Mr. Marcus Girard sipped his coffee in contemplative satisfaction and waited for his prey.

Presently his prey appeared in the doorway, Ormond in advance and his private secretary close upon his heels. On catching sight of the saloon's occupant, the leader paused, with a look of profound astonishment, then slowly an expression of happy understanding overspread his features.

"Can it be possible," he asked, "that this is Mr. Marcus Girard?"

"It can!" returned that gentleman grimly. "Moreover, it is! Pray pardon the informality of my introduction."

In spite of the biting sarcasm, Ormond positively beamed.

"Don't mention it," he begged. "I rather suspected your arrival when first I saw the Horsehair there behind us; and I'm frank in saying that I was never quite so glad to see any one in all my life."

Mr. Girard laughed. He had never actually purchased a regulation goldbrick, but had dealt with salesmen of many breeds and brands, especially in that little lane which leads from Trinity Church to Blackwell's Island. He thought he knew confidence men when he saw them, and if James Ormond and his thick-set, guilty-eyed accomplice did not fit the glittering ideal, then there was no virtue in physiognomy or the pictorial ethics of a rogues' gallery. Mr.

Girard eyed his two guests with a growing sense of humorous admiration, and again he laughed.

“Sit down, gentlemen. Upon my soul, you interest me!”

Ormond bowed in acknowledgment of the compliment and took a seat, yet being careful to select a point of vantage wherein his foot might remain in immediate juxtaposition with the loquacious Tracy’s shins.

The nose of the Spitfire had now been laid to the wind, and while the yacht still rose and fell to the heave of waves, its motion was far more comfortable. At least, Ormond seemed to find it so, for he smiled pleasantly, and was just about to express his further delight at meeting Mr. Girard, when the old financier waived formality and got down to business.

“Now, sir,” he began, while the creases returned to his firm, square mouth, “what the devil do you mean by signing my name to telegrams, stealing my yacht, and forcing me to chase you half round the globe?”

The three questions covered quite a good deal of ground; yet Ormond answered them tersely and to the point:

“Necessity, my dear Mr. Girard. A business necessity which you, as a business man, will

readily understand, and for which I can only apologize as one gentleman to another."

At this exceedingly cool dismissal of his charges, Mr. Girard grew purple in the face and began to buzz, much after the manner of a fussy, old fashioned clock about to strike, when Valda entered quietly from her stateroom, stepped behind her father's chair, and placed both hands upon his shoulders.

"Dad," she said, in an unemotional tone of voice, "I think we had better listen to Mr. Ormond's explanation. It may be valuable."

"Thank you," returned Ormond, who had risen at her entrance. "Your intelligence, Miss Girard, has been of infinite assistance from the first."

Old Mr. Girard did not altogether relish this implied comparison between his own and his daughter's intellectual methods; so he blew out his cheeks and glared at the speaker, who calmly seated himself and resumed:

"You may be surprised to learn, Mr. Girard, that I am officially connected with the Anglo-American Detective Bureau, whose headquarters are at Washington. But perhaps you have heard of me. No? Oh, well, it doesn't matter." He paused modestly; but receiving no response from his listeners, he went on: "For two years

and five months, sir, I have been on the track of one of the greatest criminals of the century, and have—I am happy to state—ensnared him."

"Is *that* the man?" snorted Mr. Girard, with an uncomplimentary gesture in the direction of Tracy. "Well, he looks it!"

The gentleman thus referred to uttered a hoarse growl of protest, while one hand slid toward his hip; but Ormond kicked him cautiously and averted trouble. At the same time the sound of a discreet cough came floating through the deck porthole, giving assurance that Captain Joe was dutifully standing by with a capstan bar.

"No," said Ormond, indicating Tracy with an affectionate nod, "this is not the criminal, but my highly esteemed assistant. The fugitive from justice to whom I refer is, as your daughter already knows, on board this yacht in the person of George C. Brown."

Valda flushed to the roots of her hair, but made not the slightest effort to refute the charge. In the circumstances it might have been expected that she would bring previous facts to bear upon the subject and brand the accuser as an unmitigated liar; but, strangely, she did nothing of the sort. Instead, she restrained her father's attempted outburst by

the firm, strong pressure of her hands upon his shoulders, and turned to Ormond.

"Go on," she said quietly; "we are listening."

He bowed his acknowledgment of her courtesy and help, then returned to his professional narrative, though addressing Mr. Girard rather than his daughter:

"We had never actually seen our man, although we had given him a close thing of it several times; and finally we received information that he was stopping at a little hotel called the Tivoli Arms, in London. For purely private reasons we did not wish to take him in England, and therefore I contrived a rather pretty plan, in which three of our agents figured conspicuously. One of them posed as a guest in the hotel, while the other two, impersonating masked burglars, attacked him in the night, robbing him of a belt supposed to hold valuable gems. One of these burglars escaped, the other being left behind feigning unconsciousness as the result of a blow on the point of his jaw; and this man, under pressure, revealed the whereabouts of his confederate. Naturally the hotel guests were in a state of excitement, and among those who presented themselves—as we correctly surmised would be the case—was Mr. George C. Brown, who——"

“Hold on!” cut in Mr. Girard. “That story may sound all right for a newspaper, but what about signing my name to your infernal telegrams?”

“I’m coming to that,” answered the imperturbable Mr. Ormond, “though possibly I should have touched upon it at first. I had called upon you at the Victoria, with the intention of obtaining your assistance, as a loyal citizen of the United States, and—there, don’t excite yourself, sir—and unfortunately found you absent. I then took the next best step by interviewing your faithful valet and prevailing upon him to——”

“Stop!” thundered Mr. Girard, swelling until he faintly resembled a toadfish badly hooked. “I don’t believe a word of it! Torkins faithful, eh. Why—why, confound your impudence, the fellow is one of your gang, sir! *Your gang!* He’s run off—do you understand me?—run off with as many of my valuables as he could carry!”

Ormond elevated his brows in polite astonishment and looked upon the old gentleman with an air of genuine commiseration.

“Dear me!” he observed. “It is too bad, Mr. Girard, really! Your man spoke to me at the time of the violence of your temper, sir, and I dare say he weakened, poor fellow, and

left before your return. It is deplorable that you should suffer such great inconvenience; but it was only through Torkins that I was enabled to secure your cigar case and the invaluable assistance of your cipher code. It is an ill wind that blows nobody good, and it——”

Mr. Girard was on his feet, in spite of Valda's efforts to keep him in his chair.

“Aha!” he cried, pointing a trembling, wrathful finger at Ormond's nose. “Now we seem to be getting at it! Do you mean to sit there calmly and confess to having corrupted my servant, attached my name to spurious telegrams, and persuaded my daughter that I was a blackguard and a smuggler? By the horns of the devil, sir——”

“Sit down,” suggested Ormond suavely, just as a wave, larger than usual, tilted the Spitfire and dumped the irate financier into his chair without ceremony. “Ah, that's better! You have grasped the situation, sir, with a brevity and conciseness which excites my admiration; but think! Could I, with the faintest degree of intelligence, board your yacht and frighten three sensitive ladies to the verge of hysteria by the knowledge that they were harboring one of the greatest criminals on earth? No, sir! The idea is revolting! It was far better that your daughter—for a time at least—should

think the worst of you; though, now, I apologize to Miss Girard most profoundly."

He bowed to that lady, but she passed the courtesy without acknowledgment, and put a pointed question:

"One moment, Mr. Ormond. If it was part of your plan, as I understand it, to lure this Mr.—er—Mr. Brown on board our yacht and hold him prisoner, then why did you refuse to pick him up when he was thrown from the tug-boat?"

Ormond smiled.

"My dear young lady, how could I do otherwise? I wished to display no personal interest whatever in the man, and correctly judged that you yourself would become his preserver. Result—what? He is brought aboard, a martyr and a hero. In the nobility of your spirit, you accuse me of inhumanity. I am forced to implicate your good father in order to secure your unsuspecting coöperation. You harbor doubts of me, in spite of evidence, and demand the gems, which you lock securely in the yacht's safe. Very good! But let us go a little deeper. I warn you against Mr. George C. Brown; but you refuse to accept my word. You interview the man himself, being predisposed to believe in him; yet, by your own astuteness, you see through his artfulness, withdraw your mis-

placed sympathy, and force him to work his passage—a position in which he could give the least possible trouble to you—and to me. Believe me, my dear Miss Girard, had you been one of my own agents, you could not have rendered me a greater help."

Valda stared at him. In the light of certain recent occurrences, there were grounds for thought. True, the statements of Mr. Ormond seemed similar to a carefully built house of cards which eventually must tumble by reason of its very flimsiness; yet, when she went back, step by step, picking up half neglected little incongruities, she saw a faint, far, glimmering possibility that this house of cards would stand.

That she had fallen in love with Mr. George C. Brown, she acknowledged to herself, but acknowledged it with shame. That she wanted to believe in him, was the dearest wish of her heart and soul; but something had happened recently—a something of which she could not speak because of the pain of it and her own humility—a something which had wiped away her faith and caused Mr. Ormond's accusations to ring in her ears like red hot bells of truth.

Now this passive acceptance of the situation on Valda's part began also to affect her father, who was striving to obliterate the personal equation and to work his business head. To

him, likewise, Ormond's story smacked of "feathers and flea bites," and yet he had seen men in Wall Street make fortunes in the very teeth of apparent impossibility.* Everything had been against them with the exception of a few ridiculous trivialities; but these same trivialities had swelled and swelled in the manner of balloons, till presently some bellowing bull would soar away to prosperity, leaving a batch of disgruntled bears to snuffle at a severed anchor rope. Therefore, Marcus Girard began to consider trivialities.

"Mr. Ormond," he said, discarding his attitude of bluster, "I would like to ask some questions."

"Do so by all means," begged that complacent gentleman. "I am here for the purpose, and request you earnestly not to consider my personal feelings in the least. As Miss Girard once put it tritely, the matter is a business one."

Mr. Girard eyed him thoughtfully, then asked:

"If you considered Brown a dangerous character, why did you not arrest him when first he came aboard, or immediately after my daughter had ordered him to work his passage?"

"Because," returned Ormond, with a smile and a careless shrug, "the Captain of your

yacht was not disposed to honor me with his complete official confidence; while your daughter's code of mercy might also prove a bar to drastic measures."

The business man glanced quickly at his child, as though he had stumbled upon a business triviality. Valda crimsoned; but Ormond, who had apparently noticed nothing, took up the thread of his explanation:

"An arrest would have merely precipitated trouble. Your crew, to a man, was on the side of George C. Brown. Mr. Tracy and myself would doubtless have become ballast till the Spitfire reached New York, when the dashing hero would have dashed away, plus liberty and the laugh on me."

Mr. Girard grunted and tried again:

"Why did you take the precaution to direct Captain Larris to lie off Sandy Hook and fly private signals?"

"For the reason," replied Ormond, "that these signals would be answered by a New York police boat waiting to back my poor authority in the matter of a protracted arrest. Meanwhile, Mr. Tracy and I have had an eye on our man night and day."

This seemed regular enough; still the financier was not yet satisfied.

"And why," he asked, "did you risk a trip

across the Atlantic instead of going straight from Calais to Liverpool?"

This time Ormond laughed.

"My dear Mr. Girard, I knew you would ask that question; but, as a business man yourself, you will fully appreciate my reasons. The English Government offers one thousand pounds for the apprehension of George C. Brown; but in our own more generous country the reward is fixed at twenty thousand dollars. Hence, my choice: a trifle selfish no doubt, but tongue-and-groove with wisdom and the laws of progress."

Mr. Girard tried to smile, and failed. That this man should quietly sacrifice him on the altar of a legal reward, was a piece of utterly astounding impudence; yet the matter was beside the actual question.

"Look here," he said, "it strikes me as a bit risky to use a valuable lot of gems as a bait for a dangerous thief; and, by the way, Mr. Ormond, where did you get those gems?"

"Imitations," returned the unruffled one; "but such clever imitations that I defy you, as an expert, to tell them from the real article without a most careful examination."

"We'll see about that later," retorted Mr. Girard, while the business creases once more appeared round his incisive mouth. "In the

meantime, just one more thing. You say you called on me at the Victoria with a view of securing my aid in this affair—with the aim of borrowing my yacht, borrowing my name, and borrowing my valuable time in the interests of an utter stranger. Now, what reason, sir, had you to imagine, for one fraction of a minute, that I would not kick you all the way down-stairs to the street where you belong?"

Ormond's eyes narrowed, as he answered with a slow and cold assurance of his ground:

"Because of my intimate knowledge of your personal affairs, which are guarded so carefully from the eyes and nose of the general public. Because of my acquaintance with your business patrons—those Washington officials who stand with one hand on the helm of the ship of state and the other on the tape of a Wall Street ticker. Because—"

Again Marcus Girard was on his feet, this time forgetting everything on earth beyond the personal equation and a shot which, if not a bull's-eye, came certainly within the outer ring. His face grew purple, while he swelled and swelled to the bursting-point of rage.

"You hound!" he cried. "I'll settle with you for this! Yes, and for something else besides your blackmail! I'll settle with you for stealing my yacht in order to carry out your

other theft! Do you think that I, an adult, in possession of his senses, would swallow this bunch of childish lies you are telling me! Nonsense, sir! Damned nonsense! You're a couple of crooks who have played your game and are caught with a crooked wheel! I know your breed, and now, by God,—”

His fist came down with a crash upon the table; but another fist came down with a crash beside it.

“Drop it!” commanded Ormond, in a tone of stern authority. “I’ve stood enough of your garrulous noise! Sit down!”

No longer was the man a meek defender of a poor position, but a grim, relentless officer of the law, aroused at last to action. He placed two powerful hands on the shoulders of Marcus Girard and forced him into a seat, then stood over him, his dark eyes snapping and his jaw set tight.

“Do you suppose,” he thundered, “that the United States Government cares a hang for you and your time and your little two-for-a-nickel yacht! If you’ve lost time, we’ll pay for it; but, in Heaven’s name, don’t make a scene for which you will only be sorry in the end. I’ve tried to be patient; but even official courtesy must have its limits, sir! Now please be rational; otherwise you will force me—against

my every peaceful inclination—to place you under arrest!"

He flung back his coat, revealing a glittering police badge pinned upon his breast, and Marcus Girard sat still and stared at it. He did so for two reasons. First, because it came to him that another Wall Street balloon was preparing for graceful flight; second, because for twenty years no one had dared speak to him as Ormond spoke, and it took the old gentleman's breath away. It was his own pet method of argument, and now he saw it work; though, truth to tell, the experiment failed to please him overmuch.

"Sir," continued Ormond, but in a far less forceful tone, "I can scarcely blame you for harboring doubts of me, and am trying to overlook your present attitude in the hope that you will remain no longer a bar to justice. Two courses are open to your choice. First, let matters rest as they are until we reach New York, where the police of that city will vindicate me of any intentional wrong to you and yours. The second is this: call in Mr. George C. Brown and question him. If his own answers do not convince you of his knavery, then, my dear sir, you are at perfect liberty to pitch me overboard or otherwise deal with me at your own discretion."

Old Marcus Girard sat still and looked at

him. He gave no further evidence of asserting his business mind, even though Captain Larris was now standing in the doorway, leaning on his capstan bar.

“Valda,” said Mr. Girard weakly, “ring the bell.” Valda complied, and soon the ministerial Miggs appeared. “Miggs,” said the master, “go tell George C. Brown that he is wanted here—immediately!”

“Yes, sir,” returned the steward solemnly, and departed on his errand.

For five minutes there was silence in the main saloon—a thoughtful silence, broken only by the whistling of the wind and the splash of waves against the Spitfire’s sides. Mr. Tracy had acquitted himself with glory worthy of a wreath; for, with the one exception of a throaty growl, his mouth had remained as firmly closed as that of the long-departed Keats.

Miss Valda Girard had also observed a rigid obedience of instructions by “keeping her eye on dad.” She was, however, just a trifle disappointed.

CHAPTER XVII

DIGGING FOR GEMS OF TRUTH

MORSON-BROWN-JONAH appeared in the doorway of the main saloon. Marcus Girard surveyed him critically, and, in spite of himself, experienced a sensation of being mentally magnetized. It was the same sensation which in the beginning had overcome Valda, Aunt Mary, and poor little susceptible Miss Polly; the same hypnotic power which, according to Ormond, had battered down the better judgment of hundreds of others—petticoats preferred—and aided George C. Brown in his reputation of star thief of two continents.

There was honesty in the very pose of the man—a fearless sort of honesty which, together with his patrician features and his clean-cut, manly figure, might well deceive a less discerning mind than that of a seasoned financier.

“Come in,” called the financier in question. “I am Mr. Girard, the owner of this yacht, and I’ve come all the way from London on purpose to make your personal acquaintance.”

The words and tone were quite sarcastic

enough to excite suspicion, and the Southerner saw clearly that his work was cut out for him. He glanced from one to another of the company, from the three men seated at the table to the faithful Captain Joe who still stood leaning on his capstan bar, and thence to the shadowy figures of Aunt Mary and Miss Polly peeping nervously from the dining-room. Lastly his eyes strove to meet Valda's; but that young lady riveted her gaze upon the floor and showed by not one sign that she was conscious of his presence.

"What is your name, my man?" asked Mr. Girard, with rasping gruffness.

"Bruce Morson, my man," replied the culprit simply.

Mr. Girard eyed him thoughtfully, while a faint smile twisted the corners of his mouth.

"Thank you," he said, employing a more courteous tone. "And now, Mr. Morson, you will oblige us greatly by repeating the story which you told my daughter when first you came aboard."

The young man flushed.

"Mr. Girard," he answered, with a peculiar tightening about his lips, "if your daughter has told you already, I fail to see the necessity of a repetition."

“On the contrary,” corrected the old gentleman, “my daughter has told me very little. I know only that you presented yourself by a means which you acknowledged to be fraudulent; that you claimed to have been robbed of valuable property, and intimated that Mr. Ormond and Mr. Tracy were in some way connected with your loss. Beyond this I know nothing, but am perfectly willing to listen to your own version of the affair and to judge you according to its merits. You are now among my family and friends. Go on, sir.”

Bruce Morson smiled hopelessly. He had once told Valda, after mature thought, that he himself would brand the teller of such a yarn as the biggest liar who ever went unhung. Before this present icy-hearted board of investigation, the same yarn had about equal chances with those of Satan sipping snow punch.

“Mr. Girard,” he began, “the circumstances connected with this affair are so unusual that I have little hope of receiving a pleasant verdict—especially so since the prosecution has worked its thunder-box before the opening of court.”

He glanced meaningly at Ormond and Tracy; but the prosecution referred to merely shrugged and waited for the defense to hang himself. The defense did his best. He began his story,

not trying to depart from the detail already known, but told it simply, carefully, though Valda noticed that he touched upon his father's death without the previous sentiment, as one who deals with a passing fact alone. Yet the tale itself was the teller's greatest enemy; for it clung too closely to the London newspaper article and the information already given by Ormond. Truly, the prosecution's thunder-box was productive of results.

When the Southerner reached that portion of his tale pertaining to the robbery at the Tivoli Arms, Tracy sniggered audibly; but cut it short when fixed by the cold, calm gaze of Mr. Morson, who digressed from his story for the first and only time.

"Mr. Tracy," he said, with a wealth of quiet meaning in his tone, "I shall live in hope of receiving a *second* evening call from you—and when it comes, I promise to do my best to entertain you!"

This one digression proved impressive to the minds of several members of the improvised jury, while the artist paused just long enough for its full effect to sink in, then continued with his defense. He finished it, down to the very end, then smiled and spread his hands.

"Mr. Girard," he concluded, "these are all

the essential facts. For further detail if you care for it, you may give me a private interview. Otherwise you must accept me as a sort of second mortgage or a protested note without endorsement."

"Polly, my dear," whispered Aunt Mary from behind the dining-room door, "isn't he perfectly splendid? I did not believe he had it in him—really!"

Polly dabbed at her eyes with a hard little ball of a handkerchief and made no answer. A silence came to the Spitfire's main saloon, and for nearly a minute nothing was heard but the whine of the wind outside, the hiss of waters, the purr of the engines at quarter speed, and the creek of swinging lamps.

"Mr. Morson," said Marcus Girard, with a suddenness which made Valda start, "I'm going to ask you several questions, and want you to answer without evasion or reserve. Are you willing?"

"Well, that depends," returned the defense, "upon the nature of your inquiries. I reserve the right to answer or not at my own discretion. Go on, sir."

This was not a particularly good beginning, and Ormond smiled. Mr. Girard, on the other hand, considered the matter soberly, nodded approval, produced a notebook, and opened his in-

quisition. Then followed a series of questions and answers similar to a cross examination in court:

“How long have you been away from New York, Mr. Morson?”

“A little more than three years.”

“How many times since then have you visited London?”

“Twice—on business for the Uganda Railroad Company.”

“Did you work personally on the Uganda bridge?”

“Yes, sir.”

“What! I was under the impression that this bridge was completed more than three years ago.”

“So it was; but I have superintended its repair work from time to time, though very little has been required.”

“The Uganda road is managed by an English syndicate, is it not?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Do you know what English firm of contractors erected this bridge?”

“It was built in America, sir.”

“Impossible! How can you say that, when the road is owned by a British syndicate and the bridge in question is in Egypt?”

“Because it is true. Each part was made in

America, shipped to Egypt, and put in place by American engineers. Look it up."

"Do you know any one connected with the Pencoyd Iron Works of Philadelphia?"

"I think not."

"Do you know any one in New York who might identify you?"

"I hope so, but am not sure. There are several gentlemen on the staff of the American Bridge Company who might remember me; but their offices are now in Pittsburg."

Mr. Girard made a memorandum in his notebook and started off on another tack:

"Can you say positively that before coming aboard the Spitfire you have ever seen either Mr. Ormond or Mr. Tracy?"

"I cannot."

"You admit, then, to having followed these gentlemen upon the unsupported word of a burglar whom you claim to have captured in your room at the Tivoli Arms in London?"

"I do."

"Suppose this man misled you purposely."

"Suppose, for the sake of argument, he did not."

The court looked over the top of its glasses and accepted the suggestion.

"Very well. You boarded this yacht by an acknowledged trick and claimed the name of

Bruce Morson, while you also acknowledge to have traveled under the name of George C. Brown in order to protect your property. Now then! For the sake of argument, how did Mr. Ormond and his secretary know of the existence of your valuables?"

"Can't say, sir, as I do not belong to the burglars' fraternity. Perhaps Mr. Ormond might offer a suggestion."

Mr. Ormond offered none, and the inquiry proceeded:

"After coming among this yacht's company, did you still persist in your belief that these two gentlemen held your gems in their possession?"

"No, sir."

"And how, may I ask, did you draw this inference?"

(The lips of the defense twitched faintly.)

"In a mental game of poker, sir."

This somewhat ambiguous answer caused a flutter of surprise among all present, with the exception of Valda, who tried not to blush, but failed. She remembered that first interview only too well, and now she bitterly reproached herself for revealing her father's secrets through the unprofessional play of her big brown eyes. At the present moment she turned them upon her judicial parent and waited anx-

iously for his next question and its answer which must involve her in the tangled skein. The question came:

“You think then, Mr. Morson, that your property had been transferred?”

Again the young man’s lips twitched, while the imps of humor danced in his fine gray eyes:

“I drew two cards on the groundhog hope of a flush, your Honor.”

(Technical reference understood by the gentlemen only. The Court stroked its chin and smiled.)

“Did you fill, may I ask, Mr. Morson?”

The defense considered the question thoughtfully and gave an evasive answer.

“I still have a few blue ones left, sir, though my stake has been reduced considerably.”

Even the prosecution laughed, but the Court rapped for order and proceeded with the cross examination.

“To whom, in your opinion, were the gems transferred?”

Valda drew in her breath and held it.

“I decline to state.”

“Positively!”

“Positively!”

“Why?”

(Shrug and no verbal rejoinder. Valda breathed naturally again.)

“Do you know where said gems are now deposited?”

“No.”

Valda turned her big brown eyes upon him for the first time, and whitened to the lips.

“Did you intend finding out?”

“Certainly.”

“Did you endeavor to do so?”

“No, sir.”

“Why not?”

“I decline to answer.”

“Why did you submit meekly to working your passage, when your position aft among the seamen would naturally preclude the possibility of learning where your supposed property was located?”

“I decline to answer.”

“Have you any suspicion, through mental poker or otherwise, as to who is the present holder of your gems?”

“I am not positive.”

“You must answer my question, Mr. Morson. Do you suspect any member of this yacht’s company with deliberately concealing property believed to be yours?”

“I decline to answer.”

The court sighed wearily, thought for a moment, then put the same query in a different form.

“Do you suspect any one or more gentlemen of this yacht’s company of being blacklegs and swindlers, possessing other unsavory attributes pertaining to their nefarious calling?”

“Beyond a question, your Honor, yes, sir.”

The court again rapped for order, refusing to sustain the objection of the earnest prosecution. The case was resumed, while the prosecution conferred in whispers.

“You confess, then, to a feeling of suspicion against two persons whom you have never before seen, and base your accusations, not upon tangible fact, but purely upon circumstantial evidence?”

“Yes.”

“Do you think the contra evidence would have any weight whatever before a court of law? I mean, is your own story one to be credited by rational, level headed hearers, Mr. Morson?”

“No.”

“Then why did you tell it?”

“Because I was asked.”

“Could you have told a more plausible one?”

“Easily.”

“Did you not consider the fact that, having once told your doubtful story to Miss Girard, you would be bound to stick to it if again questioned?”

“The same story would have been told in any event.”

“Even under oath?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Is your oath more binding upon your honor than your simple word?”

“You must judge of that yourself, sir. My own statement does not affect your predisposed opinions.”

“Where were you last night between the hours of ten and two?”

“On watch.”

“On deck?—in the immediate vicinity of this saloon?”

“Yes.”

“Did you remain on deck during the entire time?”

“Practically—yes, sir.”

“I note the reservation, Mr. Morson. To what other part of the yacht did you go?”

“At present, Mr. Girard, it is impossible for me to answer.”

“Were you in this room?”

Polly evinced marked interest in the proceedings, hanging between hysterics and a dead faint, but reserved selection pending the prisoner’s reply. The prisoner said nothing. The court spoke sharply.

“Will you answer me, Mr. Morson?”

“No.”

“On the grounds that the truth might incriminate you?”

“On any grounds you like. I simply refuse to speak.”

Polly recovered slightly.

“You are determined to give us no satisfaction upon this point?”

“None whatever.”

Except for a sense of innate refinement, Aunt Mary might have cheered. The court paused in reflection. The case was turning relentlessly against the defense, while the prosecution was quick to see its marked advantage, and grinned. The court reverted to a former question, masking it in different phraseology.

“In passively accepting a position among my crew, were you actuated by any motive other than that of the ultimate hope of recovering your property?” (Defense hesitated.) “Answer! Yes or No.”

“The question is one which cannot be answered directly.”

(The prosecution rose suddenly to its feet.)

“I beg your pardon,” cut in Ormond; “but there is *no* question concerning a man’s actions which cannot be answered by a simple Yes or No.”

“And I beg *your* pardon,” retorted the de-

fense; "but I'll prove your error by asking you a question, and will wager what you please that you decline to answer in the form suggested."

"Done!" agreed the wily Ormond, who immediately produced his pocket book and laid five crisp ten-dollar bills on the table before him.

"Will you kindly cover it, Mr. Brown?"

The prisoner before the bar took a small roll of notes from his trousers pocket, counted out the requisite amount, and laid it beside the prosecution's money.

"Now," said he, "I will put my question, and will leave to the judgment of his Honor here if said question can be answered by a simple Yes or No. Will you kindly act as referee, Mr. Girard?"

Mr. Girard nodded, and Morson-Brown turned with a smile to his sharp-witted adversary:

"Will you please tell me, sir, if the theft of my gems is the first and only burglary of which you and your partner in crime are guilty? Answer! Yes or No!"

Captain Joe laughed. A bright red spot appeared on Ormond's cheek, and faded suddenly. His lips spread into a sheepish grin, while his hand went out and pushed the money toward the

winner. Mr. James Ormond, whether officer of the law or just plain scalawag, was a sport, clean through.

Mr. Girard, however, placed his own interpretation upon certain details of the little affair, made another memorandum in his notebook, and once more took up the investigation:

“I see that you are still in possession of funds, Mr. Morson. After being robbed of everything you had on earth, how did you get these funds?”

“It is part of an amount which I had in my trousers pocket. This was fortunately not disturbed.”

“What did you lose besides your belt of gems?”

“My watch.”

“Anything else?”

“Nothing of importance.”

“Had you no papers of identification in your baggage?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Then why was no baggage belonging to you found at the Tivoli Arms?”

“Because my trunk had been sent on board my steamer at Dover.”

“Had you no papers on your person?”

“Yes, sir, in the breast pocket of my coat—in a wallet.”

“Where is this wallet now?”

“Impossible to say, sir.”

“Why?”

“Because of an accident. While struggling with the crew of the tugboat, my coat was torn off and left behind.”

“Intentionally?”

“Not by a jugful.” (Defense smiled sadly.)

“It proves one of the disadvantages of over-acting. Next time I'll know better.”

“Ah! When did you first realize your blunder?”

“When I struck the water, sir.”

“It occurred to you, possibly, that to swim back after your coat would rather interfere with the realism of your trick to board the Spitfire. Is that the case?”

“Precisely. It was play or quit.”

(The court made a note of the sporting reference, and continued its cross examination, but changing its free and easy method to one of sharp severity.)

“Do you consider your statement regarding the loss of your coat and your papers to be of any logical value?”

“No. It sounds ridiculous.”

“Do you then expect *me* to believe it, or, indeed, any other part of your equally ridiculous, cock and bull story, sir?”

“Not a pinch!”

“Nor do I!” flashed Marcus Girard, with disgusted emphasis, as he tossed his notebook on the table. “Not a pinch of it! But wait! I still have other witnesses.” He turned to Captain Larris in the doorway: “Will you kindly ask Mr. Beasley to step in here at once? You might also tell Burruss and Connor to come with him. Hurry!”

Captain Joe touched his cap and departed. Again silence reigned in the main saloon, while the culprit still stood before the table, balancing himself gracefully to the Spitfire’s roll. If Ormond and Tracy were surprised at the sudden turn of affairs, they showed no evidences of it; but Marcus Girard was certainly on their side and would aid them materially in landing one George C. Brown in the sweet seclusion of the Tombs.

Valda had taken no part in the affair whatever, and, in view of past occurrences, her lack of action was a trifle strange. She might have aided Mr. Morson-Brown materially by speaking up and telling of many things; yet, because of something which had come to pass, she held her tongue and let him fall before the judgment of her angry father. It was doubly unfair, it seemed, for the greatest cause of his conviction lay in his flat refusal to answer certain ques-

tions. Each question concerned herself, and each could be answered thus:

“I love your daughter, and am shielding her, though I suffer because of it.”

He had declined to say that he knew she held his gems, and had learned it through a mental game of poker. He had made no attempt to recover them, because he loved her. He was meekly willing to work among the crew, because he loved her. He was willing now to suffer disgrace, because he loved her. He loved her because she was straight and tall and fine, and because she permitted him to retain his grip on pride by thrashing Mr. Beasley. He loved her because she was made for him—whether scamp or paragon—and oh, how splendid this might have been, if it hadn’t been a lie!

Presently Captain Joe returned, followed by the mate and two brawny seamen; but just what order of witnesses they were to be remained for the moment a matter of conjecture. Perhaps the countenance of Beasley might be used as *prima facie* evidence—for certainly his battered features might be marked “Exhibit A to Z”—but the judge employed his witnesses for a very different purpose.

“Mr. Beasley,” he said suddenly, while pointing a stern, accusing finger at the Southerner, “*put that man in irons!*”

The order came like the bursting of a shell. Valda cried out hoarsely and leaned for support against the rosewood paneling, while Polly and Aunt Mary, in the dining-room beyond, clung, trembling, in each other's arms. The masculine spectators stared as if petrified, and the Southerner alone seemed roused to action. He flung up his chin in the manner of a horse spurred cruelly; his cheeks grew crimson, and his lips were set in a tight, straight line. The big mate glanced from the Spitfire's owner to Morson-Brown in respectful hesitation—a respect for physical predominance rather than the mental.

"I—I beg pardon, Mr. Girard," he murmured; "but we have no irons on board, sir."

The old gentleman's fist again came down upon the table, as he howled at Beasley:

"Then do it with a rope, you damned fool! I don't care a hang for your damned detail! Truss him up and be quick about it!"

Once more the mate hesitated in executing orders. He looked at the lean, sinewy athlete who had backed against the wall, and felt instinctively that another "grapevine" on the point of his aching jaw was a thing which he could not even bear to contemplate. As for the two brawny seamen, Burruss and Connor, they had no quarrel with "Browny," and also felt a

little out of his class with reference to technical hooks and swings and things; but again the Spitfire's master roared his orders, and the three men began to close in cautiously.

There might have been a very pretty row indeed, except that the close-mouthinged Tracy took a hand. Up to the present moment, he had failed to sparkle with any degree of executive ability, yet now he almost proved his claim as an officer of the law and a man of resource. He wasted no time by opening his mouth, but whipped out a short barreled, ugly six-shooter and pointed it at the head of the troublesome member.

The troublesome member smiled placidly into the yawn of the .38, advanced a step, and began to lift his arms in the traditionally accepted fashion of one who gives up hope, together with his other valuables; but suddenly one half raised hand was pointed to a porthole opposite.

“Look!” he cried, and the artless Tracy looked.

Now there was nothing unusual in the appearance of this particular porthole, and so the secretary found it; but in that instant of startled curiosity his weapon was gathered deftly from his fist, though one of its charges impaired the usefulness of a transom overhead. This was rather mortifying to an officer of the law, especially so since his own clumsiness had pro-

vided the prisoner with a loaded pistol, allowing him to once more back against the wall, a smiling master of the situation.

Ormond himself was armed, but was also equipped with understanding. He had visited in the West, and there acquired a reverence for certain hygienic laws, causing him to regard the present occasion as a trifle inopportune for the display of his own artillery.

This moral reserve, however, was rendered useless by the actions of Mr. Morson-Brown, which were strange, to put it mildly. He turned to Valda, as if waiting for her to speak in his defense, or, if not to help him, to give some sign, at least, to guide his future course; but the lady deliberately turned her head away and refused to meet his gaze. The Southerner seemed troubled. He sighed in regretful resignation, then slowly ejected the cartridges from Tracy's pistol, pocketed them, and tossed the empty weapon on the table.

“Things like that,” he remarked casually, “are sometimes apt to get their owners into trouble.” He turned to the former owner and added, in a still more quiet tone: “You might have injured one of the ladies, Mr. Tracy—or your own prospects.”

This time the spectators were more astonished than ever, for the man was literally throw-

ing away his chances as a master of the field; but a greater surprise was yet in store for them. Morson-Brown stepped quietly toward the mate and held out his wrists for the cords which should bind him fast, submitting without a protest.

“Now,” said Mr. Girard, with a sigh of satisfaction when the ropes were securely tied, “we’ll conclude this affair with a careful examination of those trouble-giving gems.” He turned to the yacht’s safe, knelt down, and whirled the little dial back and forth, clicked the handle, then opened the iron doors. “Valda,” he asked, calling over his shoulder, “where did you say you placed that cigar case which was once my property?”

Valda bit her lips and tried to prevent her voice from trembling, then answered without apparent effort:

“Far back, dad, in the left hand corner. Isn’t it there?”

“Ah!” exclaimed the old gem collector. “Here it is, and rather fat into the bargain. No wonder it caused a row!”

He laid the Morocco case on the table. Valda started, then stood quite still and stared at it, trembling violently. It was fortunate indeed that the rest of the company were so engrossed upon the fateful gems, for, otherwise,

they must have marked her agitation; but, as it chanced, there was only one who noticed, and, strangely, that one was Mr. Morson-Brown.

Mr. Girard seated himself in pleasant anticipation, carefully spread a handkerchief before him, and emptied the contents of the Morocco case upon it. It was really a fine collection—an almost flawless collection—*of dried beans!*

Marcus Girard forgot himself and swore. Ormond looked at Tracy, and Tracy looked at Ormond. Aunt Mary and Polly peered through the crack in the dining-room door and looked at Morson-Brown. Morson-Brown himself looked at Valda, and Valda turned her head away and looked fixedly at the floor. Captain Joe looked at his capstan bar and waited for further orders. The mate looked thoughtfully at Marcus Girard, and the wide eyed, ministerial Miggs stood looking at everybody through the galley door. The situation, to tell the honest truth, looked puzzling.

For a full minute there was an utter silence of astonishment; then some one laughed; and, strangely, that some one was Mr. Morson-Brown.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN THE ABSENCE OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

CONSTERNATION reigned in the Spitfire's main saloon. That some unknown party had abstracted the gems and substituted a handful of dried beans, was perfectly clear to all present. It was likewise clear that some one present was guilty of the profitable swap, though each, when questioned, denied all knowledge of the affair in varying degrees of virtuous scorn.

Ormond and Tracy immediately offered up their sacred persons to the humiliation of being searched; in fact, they seemed a trifle eager. Mr. Girard availed himself of the opportunity, went through them thoroughly, and found nothing of importance. The cabin occupied by these gentlemen was also overhauled, but without success. Mr. Morson-Brown, and that portion of the yacht hitherto honored by his slumbers, received the most intimate attention. A blank was scored. The three ladies elevated their respective noses to the loftiest angle of supreme scorn and threw open their stateroom doors for

customs house inspection. The invitation was declined. Lina Jewett, the one lady's maid on board, offered her open trunk and her resignation from service at one and the same instant. Furthermore, she was desirous of having her plump person patted all over by Mr. Girard himself (who was elderly and non-combustible) in proof that no suspicious lumps were lurking beneath her snug attire. The privilege was waived.

Every one on board seemed anxious to aid in the hunt for the missing gems. Beasley insisted that his own quarters receive a share of scrutiny, and sat with his jaw upon his palm while his lockers were being rummaged. Even the seamen were willing and eager to prove their innocence, while the ministerial Miggs wept openly as he led the way to his immaculate galley, demanding that every pot and pan be examined microscopically. Captain Joe turned all his pockets inside out and asked facetiously:

“Who’s got the thimble?”

And thus, for a time, it ended. The yacht was ransacked from stem to stern; but not one gem, genuine or otherwise, was brought to light, with the exception of various trinkets belonging to various virtuous individuals; but the search was not an easy matter. The Spitfire was wallowing aimlessly about in the trough of a heavy sea

while her tail shaft was being packed; and that swearful operation continued until three in the afternoon. Thus, hunting round for pearls and emeralds became an exercise quite similar to a "Tub of Love" at Coney Island; yet it seemed to prove one fact conclusively—the gems were lost.

Now in the absence of Sherlock Holmes, the reader must become his own deductor, while the writer is just as anxious as any of the other rascals to lend his aid in the solution of the problem.

To begin with, then, it must be remembered that sometime during the previous night a tall, slim figure appeared in the main saloon, and, like the moonbeam, flirted with the little nickel plated dial with numbers on it. First step—the safe! Next, who was the tall and slender man?

On careful selection, this interloper might be Morson-Brown or Beasley or Ormond or the second mate Lavine, or even Miggs, or any one of nine seamen out of the crew who happened to possess height and to lack inordinate circularity. But wait! The mysterious figure, being cloaked in a long, high collared dressing gown, might be that of a woman as well as a man's. The light was bad, and this figure crouched as it came, though possibly to disguise its actual height;

and therefore both Valda and the placid Aunt Mary must likewise come under the searchlight of investigation. This is ungallant, perhaps, but unavoidable.

Out of sixteen people, then, one had robbed the yacht's safe or abstracted the gems and deposited them elsewhere; and, in the absence of positive fact, circumstantial evidence must be applied to the person or persons most likely to be fitted with a cap of motive. Caution is suggested, however, and a timely warning against personal prejudice; for Valda once tried this line of argument and put her father in jail on seven serious charges, when now she felt morally certain that the dear old gentleman was as innocent of smuggling and other crimes as a newborn, cooing babe.

Suppose we take up the case of Mr. Morson-Brown. Viewing him in the most partial light, he claimed the property to be his own, and had every moral right to regain possession, provided he spoke the truth. He had told Miss Girard that he did not know where the gems were hidden, but expected to find out before the end of the voyage. On the night of the robbery he had watched on deck in close proximity to the main saloon. Miss Polly Thurman, after holding a previous clandestine meeting with him, had crept from her stateroom and handed him a

package which was about two and a half inches long and seeming hard to the touch. This would point conclusively to a door key. Mr. Morson-Brown was tall and slender. Having no dressing gown of his own, he might borrow one without its owner's knowledge, and the rest was easy. He had practically admitted entering the main saloon. As for knowing the safe's combination, that, of course, is subject to discussion; but, if he had opened the safe in some way and recovered his property, it might certainly account for his non-resistance at being held a helpless prisoner. Moreover, at the discovery of dried beans in substitution of the gems, he had laughed. Now if the property was really his, and some unknown person had it, it would be no laughing matter. If he had it himself, and retained it in spite of such careful search, then the matter might be viewed by him as humorously delightful. Certainly this train of reasoning could convict Mr. Morson-Brown and nail him with the charge of petty larceny in self defense.

Then there was Aunt Mary. She had discovered the absence of the door key and at once went to interview Miss Polly, whom she found apparently asleep. She had put that young angel through a quasi-maternal third degree, had wept on her dimpled bosom, then returned

to the keyless doorway, in a state of moonstruck retrospection and open mutiny. Aunt Mary was tall and slender. She possessed a dressing gown. She might also possess a knowledge of the safe's combination. These facts would point to several possibilities. She had robbed the safe herself in the interests of the gentlemanly Southerner, or because of Miss Polly's sentimental wish to aid him; or else the three of them were in collusion. Take your choice.

Next, if a motive of revenge would be preferred, there was Beasley. He hated his conqueror, and longed to deprive him of health, wealth, and happiness; but, so far as we know, he was ignorant of the very existence of the gems up to the moment of the discovery of dried beans. The second mate, Lavine, might also be exonerated on the plea of ignorance, a condition strengthened by the absence of motive; and this happy state of impeccability was likewise enjoyed by the ministerial Miggs, whose only desire for wealth arose from his soulful wish “to ‘ire a ‘undred stooards an’ watch ‘em bu’st their bleedin’ ‘earts by carryin’ of red’ot plates, b’Gawd!”

Thus Beasley, Lavine, and Miggs were merely possibilities, while Miss Valda Girard herself is a far more worthy applicant for the honor of your attention. She had easy access to the safe,

and knew the combination. She had not only locked up the gems with her own hands; but, it will also be remembered, she had seriously contemplated removing them to another place of safety, with an aim of forestalling Morson-Brown's attempt to regain them, or to block a similar design on the part of Ormond and Tracy, should they assume "taking ways" and endeavor to escape in a small-boat when Sandy Hook was neared. What was more simple than for Valda to get up in the middle of the night, slip on a dressing gown, creep noiselessly into the main saloon, open the safe, then transfer the fateful gems to some other depository? Her mysterious caution would be but a safeguard against a possible watchfulness on the part of the three men involved. Truly, this might seem sound reasoning, except for that ridiculous substitution of dried beans. Again, if she really did take the gems, why did she not say so and be done with it? It was strange—femininely strange—and in consequence gives rise to another theory.

Miss Valda's heart, like the point of Beasley's jaw, had received a "grapevine." She acknowledged it, but deplored it. Thus, loving without hope, was it not highly probable that she believed at least a part of Mr. Morson-Brown's story, even though she knew the rest to

be a glittering string of lies? Might she not have decided to thrust this beautiful devil from her heart forever? We are led to suspect it strongly. This being the case, she would find a sort of mournful consolation in saying to him at the parting of their ways:

“Here are your gems—for which I sacrifice the far more precious gem of Truth. Take them! There—don’t tell me your *real* story. I can bear no more. Go, in the name of pity, and may you find some worthy woman who will help you to lead a better life! Farewell—till we meet in Heaven!”

The sentiment is noble—and childishly absurd. Some ladies would have *kept* the jewels; others would have striven to retain both the jewels and the beautiful devil at one strategic haul, licking the latter into moral shape, as becomes a worthy woman, and causing him to lead a better, if not a happier, life. Few, however, could bring themselves to turn him over to the *other woman*; for, be it known, there is a marked difference between the qualities of noble generosity and asinine munificence.

Yet Valda’s case, from every point of view, was complex. There was her blushing hesitancy in speaking to her father of the gems; her strange, unhuman, unfeminine passiveness during the examination of Morson-Brown and the

other two rogues; her continued silence when the safe was opened, and her stare of amazement when she saw the Morocco case. Again, there was her refusal to look the Southerner in the eye—even with womanly scorn—and the new rôle not only seemed peculiar, but, for a spitfire, it was positively staggering.

Perhaps Valda had seen him crack the safe, and now, because of her quixotic passion, she was shielding him with a silent tongue. This was possible, but not probable, for he had sought her eyes as if asking her help; and when that help was denied him, he had sighed and held out his wrists submissively. Without a struggle he would give up liberty, he would give up wealth, he would give up hope—and her!

Beyond a doubt, the case of these two extraordinary young people is not one to be laid aside until all other suspicious persons have been completely vindicated by the process of elimination.

As for the nine tall, slender seamen who got themselves implicated merely by being tall and slender, it is just as well to say at once that they had nothing whatever to do with the silly business, and you ought to be very much obliged; but don't mention it.

Reserved for the last—like a large and juicy though somewhat speckled plum—is the case of

the Messrs. Ormond and Tracy; yet once more is tendered a warning against the evils of personal prejudice.

These gentlemen were liars. They were lurid liars, who never stuck to a first story if a second happened more nearly to fit their purpose. They had lied to Captain Joe. They had lied to Valda; and human prejudice would rise up and declare they had lied for the third and lucky time to Mr. Marcus Girard. They had given the gems to Valda under protest. They had relinquished them only when she threatened to run into Liverpool and confer with the police. They wanted those gems, no matter to whom they belonged, though whether for themselves or Marcus Girard or for other reasons, is an open question.

Ormond was tall and passably slender. He might easily be the mysterious figure in the gloom. As to his lack of knowledge of the combination of the safe, any active mind would conclude at once that the bolts and bars and combination lock on the baby bank in question were viewed by such an artist in the light of a gigglesome joke. He had delayed taking the gems for fear of Valda discovering the loss before the two men were ready to leave the Spitfire in a small-boat; but, urged by Tracy, he had contrived the simple deed on the previous night.

Mr. Girard's sudden arrival had muddled their plans somewhat, causing Ormond to declare himself an officer of the law. As for his police badge, it was merely a part of a crook's paraphernalia, and certainly it had been used with marked advantage.

Tracy's collusion goes without saying. He dreamed about that safe, and spoke of it whenever permitted to open his mouth. He had once asked his partner what method would be employed should necessity arise for opening a friend's safe in the said friend's absence; and Ormond had answered archly, in effect, that if the matter warranted haste and reason, he would blow it open. Whereupon Tracy closed his mouth and went peacefully to sleep.

On another occasion, when the Horsehair first appeared and was beating the sea with an anxious eye of light, Tracy was heard to utter a partially finished and completely damning phrase:

“Jim,” he had remarked, while gazing reflectively through a porthole, “if your friend Girard happens to be working that bullseye lantern over yonder, and if he happens to come on board, and happens to fall to the song and dance of that scrapper, George C. Brown—well, I wouldn’t give a bag of beans——”

At this juncture he had been interrupted by

an earnest suggestion from Ormond, but just a fraction too late, for the *lapsus linguae* is now on record in black and white. A bag of beans!

Dried beans were found in the Morocco cigar case in place of pearls and other precious stones. This was not circumstantial evidence; it was fact—bald, pitiless fact—and the two culprits, even without prejudice, are not entitled to acquittal by the process of elimination. They are in too deeply, and must extricate themselves by some entirely different process.

This, then, is the substance of all deductions to be worked upon. No, wait! There are still two other chances. It is barely possible that George C. Brown and Ormond and Tracy belonged to the same gang and were playing a pretty little three-cornered game. Brown himself might have sent the spurious telegrams, then followed them with his handsome, curly-headed person by means of the swaggering tug. The three would seem to play against one another in order to scatter suspicion, so to speak, escape from the Spitfire singly or collectively, meet in New York, and divide their plunder into three equal parts. Yes, this is a factor not to be dismissed without a second thought.

Finally, there is Marcus Girard. The sly old rascal might easily be deceiving his daughter for a second time with regard to his smuggle-

some traits. On the other hand, he could have abstracted the gems himself on the night of his arrival, and, by putting up a vigorous bluff, might retain the valuables for his gem collection. Tracy and Ormond had done the work, and Marcus Girard was in a fair position to gather profit unto himself by a minimum of labor. Nobody had searched *him*, by Jove! and should he consent to be patted all over in the manner suggested by Lina Jewett, there was certainly a fighting chance of discovering a suspicious lump.

As a sort of afterthought, Valda might be conscious of her father's finger in the pie, and was shielding his sin by her own shamed silence, even at the Southerner's expense. This would account for many things—her refusal to look her lover in the eye—her abasement of spirit,—the total loss of her title as a spitfire.

However, take it as you may, nearly all the foregoing evidence is circumstantial evidence; and circumstantial evidence is like a very ancient sort of gun that shoots from both ends and is rather impartial as to direction and liability.

CHAPTER XIX

THE DEVIL TO PAY AND NO PITCH HOT

JARVIS, the engineer, had finally succeeded in packing his shaft bearings, an accomplishment highly approved of by Mr. Girard, in view of the fact that his specially ordained equinox seemed every moment to increase in violence. The Spitfire, with the faithful Horsehair toiling after her, began to wriggle and plunge her way in the general direction of New York, being steered by compass only; for, in the last few hours of scudding cloud and driving rain, all reckoning as to exact locality was merely guesswork. As Valda expressed it, they were sailing by intuition.

It was frightfully rough and thoroughly disagreeable; and he who went outside by preference was, in Mr. Girard's opinion, either a duck or a jackass; therefore the party remained strictly within shelter. Valda was in her own stateroom attending to personal affairs and refusing to communicate with any one. Mr. Morrison-Brown was in another stateroom, lying flat

on his back in a bunk with his hands and feet securely bound, though Aunt Mary and Miss Polly had recklessly disregarded discipline by approaching the prisoner without warrant and placing two pillows beneath his curly head. The younger of these ministering angels would have also loosed his cords, as a further mark of celestial tendency, but the earthly Marcus Girard came in and thwarted her; thereafter the prisoner's door remained open and under the eye of the stony-hearted warden.

Mr. Girard sat propped as well as might be in a cushioned angle of the main saloon which commanded a view of the door in question, and was discussing the future with Ormond. He had conferred with that officer of the law in reference to the disposition of their captive, and had made a suggestion which caused his listener to smile. The plan was this:

On reaching New York, Ormond and Tracy were to leave the yacht quietly by boat or launch and conduct their prisoner with them, thus avoiding public notice and undesirable notoriety for Mr. Girard and his family. To this Ormond agreed readily enough; but when Mr. Girard offered to accompany the trio to police headquarters and act as witness, the courteous officer demurred. He appreciated the unselfish desire far more than he could express in words, but

could not, he said, even dream of putting his generous host to such a deal of trouble or cause him to be further inconvenienced in the interests of the law. No, Tracy and he were thoroughly competent to handle George C. Brown; and as for the missing gems, since they were imitations and of no material value, it mattered not a whit whether they were found or not.

Touching this plan of action, Marcus Girard might seem to be an easy mark, for in all probability it was just what Ormond wanted; and not only Ormond but the other two as well. If the three rascals were in collusion, they would thus leave the yacht unrestricted as to their subsequent movements. On reaching shore they would repair, not to the bar of justice, but to some other bar more healthy to themselves, and there toast the business acumen of Marcus Girard in humorous and profuse liquidity. Therefore Ormond purred to Mr. Girard's strokings, and almost arched his back.

Tracy was not present at this interesting interview; for all his energies, physical and mental, were bent upon another occupation. Truth to tell, but sad to relate, he was seasick; and, in spite of the many injunctions already imparted, he failed signally in keeping his damned mouth shut. It had, however, the result of partially acquitting him of the charge of theft, for Miggs,

who ministered to his woes, became guilty of a first and only pleasantry:

“Mr. Tracy, sir,” he observed, in ministerial tones of commiseration, “concernin’ them gems, there’s one thing jolly sure—for I’ll take me bleedin’ oath, sir, that you never swallowed ‘em, b’Gawd!”

The sorely afflicted one forbore even to criticise this English jest; but only by reason of the fact that he was too limp to resent a personal insult. In happier circumstances he might have punched the steward’s head; but now he yearned only for firm, dry land and a gastric condition less akin to a South American Republic.

The Spitfire rioted on and on in a seemingly endless effort to hurl a perfectly respectable party of ladies and gentlemen from their bunks or seats, and, in several instances, its success was marked by distinction. Dinner was an acrobatic mockery. The ministerial Miggs would poise himself artfully, till the yacht became steadied beneath a weight of waves, then dart forward and deposit trickling crockery in the laps or upon the bosoms of those desiring sustenance; after which accomplishment, he would reel away into the galley for a fresh supply.

Between courses Mr. Girard went in to interview his prisoner. In an audible voice he

criticised that unfortunate individual, telling him he richly deserved being bumped about for the rest of his life; but, just before leaving, the financier bent down and whispered something into his captive's ear. The substance of this remark was lost, by reason of the ungodly noises attendant upon a storm, yet it had a rather peculiar effect on Morson-Brown. He cursed Mr. Marcus Girard—in an audible tone of voice —then, very, very slowly he winked one eye.

Meanwhile the wind had increased into a shriek, for the storm had turned upon itself, or had done something else which was described technically by the Captain; but no one cared just what. The technicality, however, turned on the electric switch, so to speak, for thunder began to boom and shout till its rumblings played a mad accompaniment to each succeeding crash, while the lightning began to blaze and zip about, as if aimed by some drunken marksman in a frolicsome desire to put the Horsehair and the Spitfire out of business.

The transom impaired by Tracy's bullet was broken in by the violence of the wind, admitting gusts of rain and cold salt spray which distributed itself among the party with a total lack of respectful discrimination. The lamps blew out, and the main saloon was illuminated only by a single swinging lantern and the fitful

smears of lightning that splashed through the portholes, moistening a group of human faces with the dew of awe.

Captain Joe had altered his course by several points, running before the wind and saving the yacht as far as possible; but his purpose had its disadvantages. In sliding up and down the rollers, the Spitfire seemed possessed with a determination to stand first on her head and then on her tail; and, while disporting in the former undignified position, her machinery protested vigorously with certain groanings and raspings and grindings which shook her superstructure from stem to stern.

“Larris,” bawled Mr. Girard through a brass speaking tube which connected with the main saloon, “in hell’s name what’s the matter with her!”

“She’s racing, sir,” came the Captain’s answer, by which he meant that the propeller was whirling in the air, and not in the water as the inventor of the contrivance had intended. “We’ve got to trust in God and Jarvis’s shaft packing on a seven-to-one chance, sir.”

This was intended neither as irreverence nor as a slur upon Jarvis, but seven to one are poor odds in any case, and, in this particular case, they were execrable. Something happened—and it happened all in a lump. Perhaps the

shaft packing proved ineffectual after all, or one of the thousand other things known only to nautical experts occurred; but, according to general report, the Spitfire stood longer than usual upon her head, and her propeller, when relieved of water pressure and whirling aimlessly around in the air, suddenly flew off somewhere in the darkness and left the tail shaft to spin at its own discretion. It spun. Before steam could be shut off the ill-natured machinery began to buckle; and whenever machinery engages in that particular diversion, it is high time to stroll out of the engine room. There was a prolonged, magnified, rending sound analogous to that observed by a person having a jaw tooth extracted by an amateur. Also, steam escaped with a ghoulish, whistling shriek, while the stoking gentlemen made passing comments on the unusual state of things; and, as Jarvis himself expressed it, "It was some similar to a Waterbury watch throwed down—hard—and its works come loost; only it lasted longer and done better."

A part of the machinery—now don't ask me what part, because I really don't know, and you wouldn't know if I told you—a part of the machinery poked up through the galley floor and wiggled itself around after the manner of a spoon in an inverted tea cup. Thereafter, had

the ministerial Miggs been called upon to serve a light repast, it would certainly have been something on the picked-up codfish order, or, more likely still, a stew of the gumshoe-grasshopper variety.

But, fortunately, Miggs was not present. If there was one thing which his English spirit could not withstand, that thing was a thunder storm; for, like thousands of our own friends and acquaintances, his vanity was such as to convince him that each separate bolt was intended for him personally, while the fact that he still remained unsinged was probably attributed to bad marksmanship on the part of Providence. At any rate, Miggs had retired from the galley and was hiding somewhere in the darkest part of the yacht, where the gleams of the vengeful lightning failed to penetrate. Had he known, poor heart! that the butt ends of broken machinery were looking for him too, he might have gone overboard and made an end of it.

The Spitfire, when deprived suddenly of her motive power, swung into the trough of a raging sea and drifted helplessly. Captain Joe made signals of distress to the Horsehair and began to clear his boats in case of emergency; but the emergency came from a wholly unexpected quarter, for even above the howling of the wind came a sullen roar of surf, though whether it

was the shore itself or some water-hidden shoal, was an open question to be determined later by the gods of black catastrophe.

The Horsehair was too far behind to bring immediate relief; but Captain Joe Larris was not the man to sit cross-legged and play jack-straws while relief was coming. He stood on the bridge, bellowing orders through a megaphone, and his faithful seamen jumped to do his bidding. If the Spitfire's machinery was in a useless, jumbled snarl, there was still the sailing gear, though seldom used. Much valuable time was lost in hoisting a sheet that would carry the yacht away from the danger line, and, alas! it came too late, for even as the makeshift sail rose, whipping in the wind, the Spitfire struck with a shock which almost broke her patrician back.

On a sandbar it was, a most deceitful kind of bar that lay hidden beneath the low tide line, yet holding the yacht in a grip of steel, to be hammered by hungry rollers that came and came in an endless, overwhelming rush.

At the shock of grounding, a heavy spar crashed down and gave a sort of left hand "grapevine" to a corner of the main saloon. The cabin cracked and swayed; its lights were smashed into jingling, flying fragments, while its rosewood paneling split and opened into

yawning seams. Then the hurricane took a hand. It seemed to reek its special fury upon this especial spot, and results were gratifying—to the hurricane. The cabin hung on, as if by despairing strength alone; but the wind was inside now, like a cat in a sack, and presently that cabin, together with the deck above, was ripped from its moorings, torn out by its very roots. It rocked and careened with one last grinding snarl of protest, and then went whirling away in crazy somersaults, to be deposited somewhere on the bosom of geography in general.

How the yachting party escaped with life and limb was indeed a miracle. Several of them were knocked down, and all were more or less demoralized. Owing to a bisecting passageway, that portion of the roof covering the galley and the ladies' sleeping quarters was left intact; but the main saloon itself was now a yawning, wave-washed hole in the middle of the deck.

Ormond had been partially stunned by a blow on his head, but recovered quickly as the cold water dashed over him; and it was he who discovered Marcus Girard, floundering like a fat, round turtle in four inches of briny wash, and heaved him upon his feet. Polly and Aunt Mary were (if such an expression may be applied to ladies) scared blue. They clung to each

other in a speechless, horrified coma, awaiting translation to a loftier sphere.

As for Valda, her first thoughts were not of herself, or even of her father, but flew to the man who was lying bound and helpless in state-room number six. She forgot his perfidy, his cruelty and deceit—forgot all else but the man whom God had made for her; and now her mother-heart was crying out again as she groped in the darkness, seeking him. She had almost reached his door when she stumbled and fell among the débris which lay about the deck; then, as she staggered to her feet, she felt herself seized on either side by a stalwart seaman, and, in spite of her protests, was hustled toward the rail.

At the rail there was greater confusion still. Miss Polly was shrieking at the top of her lungs, striking out promiscuously with hands and feet, requiring the attention of four men to place her in a boat, while Aunt Mary's refined placidity for an instant trembled in the balance and then went to pieces on the rocks of hysteria. Marcus Girard cursed aimlessly and uproariously at everything in general, and the valiant Tracy, with his seasickness scared clean out of him, knelt down and prayed aloud for quick deliverance.

The Horsehair steamed close in, working its

searchlights in opposition to the lightning, and sent out two of its largest boats, which now were being tossed like chips on the heavy waves. On the Spitfire, a boat in charge of Beasley was cleared of its davits, with Polly, Aunt Mary, and Lina Jewett screaming in the bottom of it. Captain Larris endeavored to force Valda over the rail, when she gripped his neck and placed her lips against his ear.

“Captain Joe!” she shrilled, “*Mr. Morson! No one has cut his cords!*”

The old sea dog’s cheek grew a trifle pale as he turned and roared at the mate who was just behind him:

“You Beasley! Go at once to number six! Cut Brown loose and report! Take charge of the dinghy, and see that the prisoner has a place! Lively now! Lively!”

“Aye, aye, sir!” growled the mate, and disappeared.

Some one wriggled over the rail and dropped into the boat below. Captain Joe thought it was Valda; but it was not. It was the valiant Tracy. The corpulent Mr. Girard next claimed the Captain’s attention, and when that gentleman plumped in, like an overripe pear, the boat shot away from the Spitfire’s side.

The Horsehair had come in as close as its navigator dared, and was acting as a buffer for

the Spitfire, catching the force of rolling seas and leaving a comparatively quiet stretch of water between the yachts, thus giving the small-boats their only chance to live. Captain Joe ran aft, bawling orders to his men in the other boats, and watching, as a Captain should, to see that every soul was safe ere he himself might leave his stranded craft. In a flare of lightning he saw the face of Beasley in a rocking boat below, and called to him in a roar which sounded above the blast, demanding to know if Morson-Brown was free.

“Aye, aye,” came the answer down the wind, and for an instant more the brave old salt stood out alone beside his rail, then, catching a flying line, he swung himself into the last departing boat.

The Horsehair was fighting desperately to keep away from the Spitfire’s side and yet clinging close enough to be its shield, while her crew were working with a will in the cause of rescue. The boat containing Mr. Girard and the ladies was picked up neatly, at the same time preserving Tracy’s valuable life—a deed to be commended to the attention of Mr. Andrew Carnegie. Let us hope!

It was hair-raising work, in any case, for the Horsehair, while swinging to the very edge of the dangerous bar, and being driven by a whis-

ting wind, was taking odds with fate. Once on the shoals, she would go to pieces, not only sacrificing her own crew, but throwing away her one remaining hope of rescue; therefore, as each boat was caught and its occupants drawn safely up on deck, the big black yacht fought inch by inch for keel room against the wind and waves.

One boat remained in the grip of angry waters—the Captain's—and now it tossed and pitched like a tiny cork as its oarsmen strained toward the Horsehair's side. Nearer they came and nearer still; then suddenly Captain Larris cursed aloud, and his boat was once more swung toward the stranded yacht.

In a blaze of lightning he caught the flutter of a woman's dress, and the ghostly whiteness of a face above the rail.

CHAPTER XX

ARRANGED BY MR. NEPTUNE

WHEN Captain Joseph Larris had roared at Beasley, ordering him to release the prisoner, the mate had growled back a grudging "Aye, aye, sir," and plunged away across the rocking, slippery deck; but, to Valda's perceptive mind, he not only returned too quickly for the strict obeyance of commands, but returned alone and slipped guiltily into a waiting boat, without reporting to Captain Joe. She knew how the mate hated Mr. Morson-Brown, and it came to her that here was a treacherous chance of revenge upon an enemy—to leave him bound and helpless while the yacht was hammered to fragments on the shoals. At the thought her rage flared up—not as a spitfire, but in righteous fury; yet perhaps it was something more than fury, after all, for she caught herself sobbing as she left the rail and stumbled through the darkness to the man whose life was dearer than her own.

She found him wrenching vainly at his cords, and, in spite of his protests, flung herself beside

him, striving to untie the knots with nervous, trembling hands, but the knots had been made by seamen and refused to yield. He begged her to leave him and to save herself before it was too late, but his pleadings passed unheeded; then, seeing she was quite determined, he resorted to a quicker method of release. Neither possessed a knife, but on the floor were many bits of glass from the shattered transoms, and with one of these he directed Valda to sever the bonds upon his wrists. For a moment or two she groped without success, till a flash of lightning aided her; then with a jagged piece of glass she sawed at his cords, while the air was filled with awesome noises and the floor was awash with bubbly brine; but at last the wrist cords parted with a snap, and the hands of Mr. Morson-Brown were free.

“God bless you!” he whispered, and pressed her fingers to his lips. “Now go—and leave the rest to me!”

He took the bit of glass, intending to cut the heavier cords which held his ankles; but Valda lingered, imperiling her life by every instant of delay, deaf to his reasoning, till he brought a harsher method into action.

“Go instantly!” he commanded, in a tone employed by Captain Joe when occasion required some lazy seaman to proceed upon the jump.

"If you don't," he added, by way of a ghastly threat, "I swear I'll stay right here and drown! Do you hear me? Go!"

Valda was unaccustomed to this manner of address, and in the shock of sudden and abnormal authority, she found herself obeying with the meekness of a lamb, scrambling away to safety, while a partially rescued scalawag sat up in his bunk and slashed at his hempen bonds. This task proved not an easy one, for the cords were tough, and presently the thin glass broke in his eager hand, forcing him to roll to the floor in search of another piece. Much time was lost in feeling around in a half an inch of water, but he found what he sought at length, completed his work, and hastened to thwart brother Beasley's charitable scheme of providing the fish with food.

On reaching the deck he caught a glimpse of Valda clinging to the rail, her face gone white with terror, while beneath her a little boat was tossing upon the waves, now rising to the deck line, now sucked away as into some yawning gulf, as the crew fought desperately to live.

"*Jump!*" bawled Captain Joe, as the boat shot upward on the hump of a mighty wave.

"*Don't!*" yelled Mr. Morson-Brown, who leaped toward her from out the darkness.

Valda hesitated just a mite too long. She

flung herself outward to the Captain's waiting arms; but the boat beneath seemed jerked into a bottomless pit, and Valda tumbled after it.

To her it seemed the fall of some hideous dream—endless—horrible—till the sea rose up again and struck her with an icy “grapevine,” dashing out her breath, her power to scream, crushing her breast with the weight of worlds that hummed as they rolled, and sounded in her ears like wheels on a distant bridge. She choked, and the blackness grew less dense, for the sea seemed filled with myriads of whirring sparks. Her mother was calling—that loved one whose memory was a holy thing—but some one would not let her go. His arm was about her, gripping like a belt of brass, dragging her upward, but always beneath the humming wheels. She was tossed and pitched in crazy circles, fighting with all her might against two powers that fought each other for possession of a girl—herself! She knew it was herself, because, somehow, she could see herself, while a man and the waters battled for the mastery. Round and round they went like people fighting on a deck, till they fell with a jarring crash against something very hard, and the sparks winked out and in their place came a horrid smear of light—but the wheels droned on and on.

Then Valda knew that she had died—had died

as down in the bottom of her heart she had longed to die—with her head on the beautiful devil's shoulder.

To those who watched from the Horsehair's decks, the whole thing came and went with a quickness which left their senses stunned. In the flashlight's blaze they had seen a woman at the Spitfire's rail. They had seen her leap toward the boat below, to miss it and be swallowed in a hungry flood. They saw a man dart out from somewhere and clutch at her fluttering dress as the girl went over; then he vaulted the rail, stood poised for the space of an indrawn breath, and shot downward in a splendid, stiff-limbed dive.

And here, so far as the watchers were concerned, the affair seemed taken up by Mr. Neptune and his fishy relatives. They could see old Captain Joe stand up in his rocking boat to hunt in vain for the vanished pair, while his curses rose like whispers above the howling of the wind; and then, for the next few moments, they were selfish and thought of nothing but themselves—although there chanced to be extenuating circumstances.

Something went wrong with the Horsehair's flashlight. It crackled, spit weakly for an instant more, and then went out for good; yet its

last expiring ray lit up the scene and marked a memory in the souls of all who watched. The biggest wave in the whole Atlantic Ocean came along. The Horsehair rose up and up till those on deck could almost look into the Spitfire's funnel, then reeled and wallowed down to the very maw of a ravenous sea. Her keel was felt to grate along a crust of shells, then the big black yacht came wabbling back on the tail of a watery avalanche. The watchers breathed once more and forgot their selfishness.

Now, failing to swamp the Horsehair, this mighty wave in question devoted its pique to the stranded Spitfire and, dramatically speaking, reaped results. It first created a cavernous hole by suction, then came with a rush, got under the yacht, lifted it as an athlete lifts a medicine-ball, and heaved it across the bar into deeper water just beyond. Thus, in the flashlight's dying splutter, the watchers saw the Spitfire being driven shoreward, half submerged and smothered by a cataract of flying spume.

They picked up Captain Joe, grappling his foundered boat and bringing him aboard by force, for the old man sobbed aloud and cursed his heart for the black though unwitting crime of leaving a woman to die on his stranded craft. As his grief abated, a fury took its place—a fury at Beasley who had caused the tragedy—

and had five seamen not held the Captain hard and fast, another tragedy would surely have been enacted on the deck of the surviving yacht.

But the Spitfire was gone, no longer to be seen through the spindrift and lashing rain. To linger was worse than useless; so the Horsehair put for safety out to sea, then turned and made for shelter, reaching harbor a little after midnight, where she waited till the storm should pass. There was sorrow on board, sorrow and despair; yet had the mourners been conscious of certain vagaries of the sea, their hearts might have risen up on the buoy of a little hope.

Mr. Morson-Brown had dived. Mr. James Ormond's previous statement that the fellow could swim like a fish helps greatly to substantiate the present statement that the fellow went down into a raging sea and came up again with a lady in his arms. The fellow claims, however, that his coming up was due far more to chance than to his own ability, for an undercurrent caught him, dragging him whither it pleased, whirling him away from the spot where Valda and he went down, then mercifully banged them against the bowsprit. He claims to have clung there to the chains and yelped for aid, but does not claim that this feat was accomplished by superhuman grit alone—it being understood

that the compliment applies to the clinging rather than the yelping, though both were born of an ethical intent.

When the biggest (and most accommodating) wave in the Atlantic Ocean came along, it not only tore the Spitfire from its grip upon the shoal, but also loosed the grip of Mr. Morson-Brown, breaking his hold on the bow chains, but not on Valda. Indeed, it gave him another arm to clasp her waist, and together they were lifted up and up, to be released at last and landed with a thump in an angle of the forward deck, the gentleman beneath the pile, his head humming and his teeth well-nigh jarred out of him.

“What luck!” he gasped, as he braced himself against the suck of receding water; then, with Valda in his arms, he lay quite still and recovered his exhausted breath. Again he heard the roar of waves; again the Spitfire struck, heeled over till her decks were washed with racing scud, ripped loose, and once more staggered away toward the shore.

This latter incident was most certainly a piece of luck, for the yacht had grazed the jagged ribs of a sunken schooner, and swung into a little bay. She was still forced shoreward by the wind; but the waves were less enthusiastic, and in this condition the panting Southerner was

overjoyed to see a fighting chance. His first care was for the unconscious lady in his arms; for now he must be both lover and physician; though, truth to tell, his initial act of aid was a trifle unprofessional. He sat up, with his back against the forward cabin, looked down into the still white face that nestled against his breast, and then—he kissed her.

This was wrong of him, no doubt; but again, no doubt, he had his reasons. Her lips were cold and wet and salty and unresponsive, so it clearly may be seen that he got no actual pleasure from the chaste salute; but he afterward explained his unselfish purpose, though hardly to the lady's satisfaction. At any rate, it failed to rouse her; so the young man, being of a practical turn of mind, began to cast about him for a further means of resuscitation. Happily (for the sake of sentiment and conventionality) there were no convenient barrels lying round the deck; but the capstan was there, a good stout post with a round brass top, and the physician *pro tem.* made a virtue of necessity. He sighed, but hoisted up the lady of his heart, laid her face downward on the capstan post, waived sentiment—and rolled her.

To Valda's half defunct subconsciousness, she seemed to be rather badly treated at the hands of persons unknown and sadly lacking in the

crudest principles of humanity; but the hateful wheels had stopped their humming; and the prisoner was free. She had saved him at a sacrifice—even if he *was* a most unmitigated liar—and nothing mattered now since *he* would live. For the rest, it was better not to think about it—easier to let it pass away as her other dreams had passed—so Valda wisely closed her mind to the little things of life—and went to sleep.

CHAPTER XXI

THE MORNING AFTER

VALDA slowly opened her big brown eyes in wonder. Her surroundings seemed partially familiar, yet the bed whereon she lay was tilted at a most ridiculous angle, while her pillow moved up and down as if it were breathing peacefully. Her three most prominent sensations consisted of weakness, bewilderment, and warmth. Her head was dizzy, and things insisted on floating around in foolish, unnatural circles, while through a porthole came the sickly light of morning, flooding her bed clothes with a coloring which was utterly absurd. She knew that color; it belonged by rights to the red plush curtains which hung at the doorway of the dining-room; yet now they were wrapped around her to the chin, causing a perspiration which reached a point of positive unhappiness. As for her pillow, moving so queerly up and down, she raised her eyes and discovered, with a maidenly gasp of horror, that she leaned against the chest of Mr. Morson-Brown.

In addition to this unusual state of things, she was conscious of a faint but very human snore, and, moving as gently as she could, she sat upright in her own berth on board the Spitfire and looked with increasing wonder at a handsome young gentleman seated on the edge of her bed, fast asleep, with his broad back resting against the wall. How had he got there? What was he doing in her room? How dared he! But her head was once more humming, so she closed her eyes and leaned against the rosewood paneling. She remembered dying; but the rest was all confused and silly and horribly impossible. But here she was, and there *he* was; and now his dear gray eyes popped open, while he spoke to her through the fog of half conquered sleep:

“Hello! I mean—excuse me—good morning! Feel all right?”

She nodded silently, pulling the red plush curtains more closely about her shoulders, for it came to her suddenly that her clothes were very loose, and she turned the color of her crimson covering.

“How—how did we come here?” she stammered feebly.

“Give it up,” he answered, fighting with his own confusion, for he started and rose quickly from her bedside, blushing like a boy. “The fairies take care of the Irish, maybe—but—”

He stopped and half turned away, then began to speak rapidly, disjointedly. "It's all right, though—everything fine as a fiddle—so don't worry. Your father and Aunt Mary and Polly and—and all the rest are safe on the Horsehair. You'd be there too if you hadn't come back to cut me loose, God bless your heart!—and you were simply great—but don't worry. Here we are—don't know where exactly, but somewhere,—Jersey probably—but all right—tilted over a little, but that's all—and it's stopped raining, thank the Lord! and now what do you say to breakfast?"

This statement of prevailing conditions was jerky but comprehensive; yet, to Valda's mind, a mass of important detail had been skipped.

"But," she persisted, "how—I fell in, I think,—how did I get back?"

"Bully big wave," he informed her briefly, with his face still turned away. "It grabbed you and pitched you back. First time I ever had a lady *thrown* at me. Delightful experience, really! Then we hung on somehow and thrashed around till—till the fairies came along—but don't you worry. Now suppose you fix up a bit—neither of us needs a bath—and—well, when you are ready, just sing out and I'll come and get you."

There appeared to be an unbelievable bashful-

ness in his tone and manner, so utterly foreign to the man that Valda wondered at it, even when he was climbing awkwardly from her state-room. This method of egress was rendered quite necessary, by reason of the fact that the floor was on an angle of some thirty-odd degrees, though perfectly steady, proving beyond a doubt that the yacht was stranded somewhere near the shore. This nearness to dry land was comforting, at any rate; so Valda, following the suggestion, began to "fix up a bit," and therein discovered the probable solution of her fellow marooner's bashfulness. Her shirtwaist was unbuttoned entirely down the back, while beneath it her lacings were cut from top to bottom for the benefit of unrestricted respiration.

"Now isn't that *like* a man!" she murmured, blushing furiously. "To *cut* it, instead of just unhooking! But—but I think it was very nice of him."

Then Valda made another quaint discovery. Her shoes were gone. Her feet and ankles were carefully wrapped in a woolen dressing sack; but in it also was a claret bottle filled with luke-warm water. How he had heated the water was a mystery; but heated it he had, and ministered to her needs with simple, tender, motherly intelligence.

So Valda forgot her qualms of modesty, for

her big brown eyes were glistening with tears. She could remember almost nothing of what had taken place; but little things came back by piece-meal and warmed her heart. There was her icy plunge into the sea, the memory of blackness and the sparks, the grip of an arm about her waist as she struggled with some one frantically; the far faint recollection of being roughly treated at the hands of unknown parties, while the wheels hummed on and on. It was not a great deal to work upon, but quite enough to establish one important fact; that statement of Mr. Morson-Brown's, concerning "a bully big wave which had thrown her at him," was—no, not another lie exactly, but a beautiful, glorious, gentlemanly whopper!

As Valda repaired her costume as best she might and did her hair by intuition in the absence of an unsmashed glass, she could hear the whopper-telling gentleman whistling merrily outside, his music accompanied by the sound of chopping; then presently, when she had found her shoes and made herself a little more presentable than the average castaway, she scrambled out on deck.

The Spitfire was lying in shoal water, half on her side, while a dozen feet beyond lay a sandy beach. Away off at right and left were seen the dim outlines of towns or settlements; but in the

rear great sand dunes rose to obstruct the view. In the foreground sat the Atlantic Ocean, as meek as a whipped puppy, now making believe it could never rise up in wrath; and (to use a poetic license) wagged its tail.

The deck was a muddled junkshop, filled with twisted, mutilated things of every sad variety; and Valda felt a pang of pity as she looked upon the wreck. No more would the Spitfire skim the seas to the strong, proud pulse of her double-expansion engines, for she lay like a battered gull with broken pinions and a broken heart.

On the beach stood Mr. Morson-Brown, shielding his eyes from the smoke of a fire he had built, and feeding the blaze with choppings from the Spitfire's cabin walls. At Valda's call he waded out waist deep toward her, directing her to slide carefully down the deck; then he held out his arms to carry her ashore. Valda flushed and hesitated. To slide down the deck was one thing; but the human ferryboat was quite another; so she did the first, then boggled at the second.

"Look here!" said Morson-Brown, with mock severity, "I'm not going to *eat* you, although I believe I'm hungry enough to do it. You needn't get wet again; so come along and don't be foolish. Just sit on my shoulder and see that

your skirts don't trail. It isn't the *first* time you've sat on me, by a jugful! Are you coming?"

Valda laughed with him. This was Bohemia with a vengeance; but somehow, strange to say, she liked it. True, it *was* unconventional; but she was certainly at a sea beach, and at sea beaches conventional things are easily forgotten; so she sat on his shoulder, steadyng herself by holding firmly to his curly head, tucked in her skirts with her other hand, and was ferried safely to the shore. Here they both laughed again—at nothing in particular, to be sure—and began their preparations for a morning meal.

"Couldn't I—er—boil something?" suggested Valda, glancing doubtfully at a kettle which was set across two large wet logs. Her companion shook his head.

"Afraid not, for the present, for there isn't anything to boil. You see," he explained, "the galley is under a good two feet of water, and is so chock full of invalid machinery that I could only rescue that kettle there, a fork, and one tin cup. If we want any breakfast, I reckon we've got to shoot it. Excuse me a minute, please."

He waded out to the wreck and disappeared into what had been the private cabin of Mr.

Girard, returning with a light shotgun and a handful of cartridges.

“Saw it this morning,” he told her, “while I was prowling about in search of something to devour. Ever eat sandpiper sauté? No? You astonish me! Neither have I; but we’re going to try it—Fate and the sandpipers being agreeably disposed. Here goes!”

Along the beach were flitting a dozen or more little tweetering mites of the snipe variety; but, just as the Nimrod inserted the cartridges and closed his gun, they took an unaccountable fright at something and went tweetering away from the honor of being laid to rest in the charming person of Miss Valda Girard.

“How perfectly disgusting!” she murmured, in a tone of such hunger-thwarted disappointment that the laughter of Mr. Morson-Brown went ringing across the dunes.

“Think of it from the sandpipers’ point of view,” he urged, “and you’ll find it far less dismal. But cheer up, Miss Robina Crusoe, for if Friday isn’t very much mistaken, yonder comes our breakfast.”

“Where!” asked Valda, wheeling sharply and staring at the water as if she expected one of Sherry’s waiters to rise smirking from the Atlantic Ocean with coffee and rolls for two. No waiter appeared, however; so she followed the

direction of her companion's pointed finger and descried two tiny specks that circled round and round, but swung steadily toward them.

"They are plover," he explained; "a little out of season, probably, but we'll bury their plumage and leave no telltale bones. Come along—we must get to cover."

He led the way to a point where the stranded Spitfire lay between them and the circling birds, and began to utter a peculiar, chirping call. Valda watched the unusual proceeding with increasing interest—an interest augmented by a very healthy appetite, but troubled somewhat by a fear lest her prospective breakfast should get away.

"Oh, dear!" she whispered nervously, "if only there was a tree and those two birds would light in it and let you creep up near enough—"

"Why, yes," he interrupted with a chuckle, "that would be very nice of them indeed; but as long as I have known the plover family, I never saw a member of it light in trees. I reckon you'll have to hold them while I shoot their heads off. Duck!"

"Duck!" asked Valda, looking in every direction for the fowl. "Where?"

"Nowhere!" he whispered fiercely. "I mean—sit down!"

"Oh!" said Valda, and plumped upon the

sand—not that she understood in the least what he was talking about, but rather because she once more found herself a victim to his sharp authority. She was wondering why she obeyed so meekly just as the brace of plover made a wider circle and swung in close to shore; then suddenly came two quick reports that sounded almost as one, while both birds crumpled up and dropped into the water.

“Goodness gracious!” she exclaimed in bewildered admiration. “How ever did you do it?”

“Luck,” he answered, wading out to fetch his prey. “The gun must have gone off in my hands.”

Valda looked at him curiously. He seemed so different from the man she had known on board the Spitfire; but just where that difference lay it was impossible to designate. He was still courteous, as he had always been. He was mindful of her comfort, and had done far more for her in the last long night of terror than a brother or a father might have done. But would he not have done the selfsame thing for any other woman in distress? Ah, there the difference lay! A declining interest in *her*—personally! He no longer looked at her in open admiration, and even his humor seemed strained and just a little flat. He wanted to be rid of

her—that was it!—and was too polite to say so. Oh, well, if he took this view of the situation, he should not lack for opportunity.

Valda did not try to engage him in further conversation, but sat on the sand in silence, busied with her own regretful thoughts, watching while he picked the birds, washed them carefully in a rain water pool on the beach, then roasted them over his fire on the iron fork he had fished from the Spitfire's mangled galley.

“Breakfast ready!” he called out presently in the cheeriest of tones; and when she came to him she found the birds most beautifully browned and laid out on a piece of clean, warm board. As she seated herself on the opposite side of the fire, he filled the one tin cup from the boiling kettle and set it beside her on the sand.

“Better take it hot,” he suggested. “It will warm you up and drive away the blue devils who have come, I see, to pay you their respects. Sorry about the bread; but the baker disappointed me.”

She made no attempt to even smile at his sorry jest, but pointed to the cup he had given her, and asked him seriously.

“And from what do you propose to drink?”

“Me? Oh, I’ve had mine some time ago—I like it cold. If I choke, we’ll forget the past and

make that jeweled beaker of yours a loving cup. Shall we?"

Valda ate a plover leg in silence. Under other conditions this might have been a very merry meal indeed; but a nameless restraint had risen up between them, caused by a subject uppermost in the mind of each, yet both were now avoiding it uneasily. Twice Valda started to speak, thought better of it and munched her bird in silence, sipping from time to time at the cup of heated water; then suddenly she turned to him:

"Mr. Bro—I mean, Mr. Morson," she began, "I want to thank you for all you did for me last night."

"Don't mention it," he answered carelessly. "Plover all right?"

She waved her hand to check his dismissal of her subject.

"I'm serious, Mr. Morson; and also I'm very, very grateful. But tell me—honestly—did you really dive into the water and bring me back?"

For a moment he studied her earnest features, while the imps began to dance again in his strange gray eyes.

"Well, not exactly that," he temporized; "but, you see, I fell in too; and we got so mixed up together that it's awfully hard to remember all the funny things that did happen. I do remember hanging on to something, and the next

thing I knew we were bumping about on deck. Lucky—wasn't it?"

Valda read between the lines and nodded, without answering at once. She thought also of the hot water bottle and her severed laces, but made no mention of them.

"Yes," she murmured presently, "it was *very* lucky—for me. What did you do next?"

"Honestly?"

"Of course."

"I kissed you."

Valda's cheeks grew scarlet. She sat bolt upright and dropped her half eaten plover in the sand.

"Oh, how dared you!" she demanded in withering scorn, selecting the most unoriginal phrase she could think of; and this was possibly the reason why it failed utterly to disconcert him.

"Well," he argued in bland impertinence, "I wanted to restore you. I tried burnt feathers, but my patient's coma refused to respond to treatment. I then resorted to more heroic measures, on the intelligent theory that if I got you mad enough you would certainly wake up; but—"

"Stop!" commanded Valda. "We will *not* discuss it further. One treachery more or less can make no difference now. If you told the

truth—which this time I do not doubt—it more than offsets my debt of gratitude for your act in saving me. This ends it—we are quits!"

She paused and began to look for her plover in the sand, failed to find it, looked up suddenly, and was astonished to see her companion brushing it off with his handkerchief and eating it complacently, while his own bird, untouched till now, had been slyly set before her.

"Mr. Brown," she said, with formal iciness and as great a degree of dignity as she could bring to bear, "you will give me back my plover—instantly!"

"Couldn't think of it," he returned, his mouth half full, his gray eyes closed till they seemed to be nothing more than twinkling slits. "I need all the sand I can get to chirk me up beneath the vials of your rising wrath. Fall to, my valiant trencher lady, for the morning waxeth late!"

She looked at him severely, pushed his profffered bird aside, rose, and went down the beach to wash her hands in the cool salt water. She was gone a long time—five minutes, possibly—and then came slowly, thoughtfully, back to him.

"Mr. Brown," she began, employing a tone which might have been bestowed upon a casual acquaintance, "a person finding this yacht deserted could claim salvage, could he not?"

Mr. Morson-Brown nodded politely.

"Yes, I believe he could."

"Thank you," said Valda. "But if I am on it, it could not be called deserted. I wish to save my father all the loss I can; so I intend remaining aboard the Spitfire until he comes to find me. I shall get on very comfortably, so you needn't worry; and—and as for you"—she flushed slightly and hesitated in her delicate suggestion—"as for you, you have an opportunity to—to escape."

"*Escape?*" He looked up at her in undisguised bewilderment. "I've done it already, haven't I? But if it gives you any pleasure to see me wallowing around in the ocean——"

"No," she interrupted nervously, once more blushing to the roots of her hair, "I don't mean the ocean; but, I mean—well—from father and—and the police."

For an instant the young man's eyes flashed angrily; then he shrugged and sat in silence with his chin upon his palm.

"Miss Girard," he said at length, while looking out across the sea and speaking in a tone so gentle and so sad that it made her long to forgive him everything, "we seem to be all mixed up again; but I hope some day we both may understand. It's about those infernal gems. Is that what's troubling you?"

"Yes," she answered, turning her eyes away, "the gems—and other matters."

"Please sit down," he begged; and when she had complied with his request—although for the life of her she could not tell just why she did it—he spoke again: "You've said a lot of hard things to me in the last ten days, and I think we ought to have an understanding—you and I—right now. Is that agreeable?"

"Perfectly."

"Thank you," he answered gratefully, and then grew strangely serious as he looked straight at her across the fire. "To begin with, why didn't you help me out when your father was asking questions which you knew I couldn't answer?"

Valda's cheeks began to glow again with returning indignation.

"Why didn't *you* help *me*?"

"I *did*," claimed the bland aristocrat, "all I could. That is to say, without telling the actual truth."

"What!" cried Valda, in anger and amazement. "Then why *didn't* you tell the truth?"

He gazed at her in round eyed, honest wonder.

"Because—if you really want to know—I was trying to spare you all I could."

"To spare *me*!" shrilled Valda; also in round

eyed wonder, “why—what do you mean, sir!—what do you mean?”

“You know perfectly what I mean. What do you mean?”

There was an awkward, dragging pause.

“Well, about those gems——”

“Yes, about those gems——”

Again they stopped abruptly, and for half a minute sat there, staring at each other, puckering their brows and striving to put their conflicting thoughts in the form of speech; then, suddenly, both half rose to their knees, pointed their index fingers across the fire, and spoke as in a single voice.

“*I—saw—you—take—them!*”

For a moment longer Miss Valda Girard and Mr. Morson-Brown remained in their fixed positions, resembling two highly dramatic figures in the *Eden Musée*; then their mouths began to open slowly, while still more slowly they sank into sitting postures on the beach. Valda was inclined to view the matter seriously; but her fellow criminal rolled upon the sand and laughed.

“Oh, Lord!” he chuckled, “if *you* are not a thief and *I’m* not a thief, then who in thunder’s got ‘em!”

The question—for a time—remained unanswered.

CHAPTER XXII

SALTING A VALUABLE BIRD

MR. MORSON-BROWN stopped laughing and sat up. In view of Valda's last accusation and her facial denial of her own guilt in the matter of the gems, he began to see the affair in an utterly different light. When the cigar case had been opened by Mr. Girard and the collection of dried beans came out, he had at once acquitted Ormond and Tracy of theft, on the ground that their astonishment was too *bona fide*, even for experienced hands; but in Valda's face he had read a very different story, and this, coupled with what he already knew—or thought he knew—caused him to jump at blundering conclusions.

“Look here,” he now said, turning to her with the old expression of admiration in his eyes, “do you mean to tell me that you stood there and kept your angelic mouth shut just because you thought that I—well, that I had rifled your safe of my own jewels and was lying about it?”

“Yes,” confessed Valda very faintly; “but you see——”

"No, wait a minute. You must have had your reasons, and good ones too. Now suppose we get down to actual business. Don't keep anything back; but go for me—as hard as you choose. I promise not to interrupt, and will answer any questions you care to put. Now then—shoot!"

He stretched himself out at full length on the sand and locked his hands beneath his head. Valda hesitated, half in doubt and half in hope, then turned her big brown eyes upon him and began:

"Mr. Morson, if I hurt you by anything I say, I trust you will forgive me; but I've been so upset in the last ten days that—well, I don't know yet just *what* to believe of you." He nodded in appreciation of her doubts, and Valda went on again: "I had a feeling that something was going to happen that night, so I stayed awake to watch. I had made up my mind to take the jewels out of the safe, and just as I started to do so, I heard Polly unfasten the door which leads on deck from the passage between our staterooms. I knew you were out there; so I followed Polly and saw her slip something into your hand and then creep back as if she were afraid some one would hear or see her. Aunt Mary must have seen her too, for she went straight in and talked to Polly; but—yes, I

listened, Mr. Morson, deliberately—but I couldn't hear a single thing, except that Polly was crying. At first I thought of going to them myself and demanding to know what it was all about; but I felt so hurt at the way Aunt Mary had treated me that I concluded to wait and investigate on my own account; so I just lay still and listened. After a long time I thought I heard a slight noise, quite near me, and I eased open my door in a little crack and peeped out. It was dark in the dining-room, for both lamps had gone out; but—but the moonlight came in through the transoms and—and I saw your face—distinctly.”

The narrator paused and looked at him in silent, sorrowful inquiry.

“Yes,” he said, without emotion. “I was there. Go on.”

She drew in her breath sharply at this shameless confession of his guilt, and again took up the thread of her interrupted story:

“I couldn't imagine what you were doing in the dining-room at that time of night; but I determined to find out at any cost. Had you been in the main saloon where the safe was, I—for-give me—I could have understood; but—but you had no business in the dining-room.” Again she paused to choke her returning indignation, and resumed: “I remember that it took me some

minutes to find my wrapper, because it had fallen behind a chair; but when I did find it and crept out, I saw you again—I mean, I saw some one kneeling in front of the safe; but you—or the other person, I can't imagine who—had on a long dressing gown with a high collar, and then—well, I knew I was going to cry, so I slipped back into my stateroom and—and did it."

She stopped again, and Mr. Morson regarded her with a faint, flickering smile.

"Miss Girard," he asked, "why didn't you switch on the electric light and catch me red handed?"

"I—I don't know," she stammered, telling the real reason in the color mounting to her temples. "I thought of it, but—but I just couldn't!"

"Well, bless your heart!" he murmured, in his gentle Southern accent. "I think I understand it—and I won't forget. Is that all?"

"No," she answered, not daring to look him in the eye; "there is something more. After a while I got up and went to the safe myself; but when I opened it and looked carefully, even with a lighted match, the cigar case wasn't there."

The young man beside her laughed. Valda glanced at him with an expression of pained reproach and went on:

"That is why I was so dumfounded when

dad opened the safe next morning and found the case just where I told him to look. I couldn't understand, and I don't understand now, how it ever got back into the safe with—with dried beans in it." She sighed and looked him squarely in the eyes. "Why did you do that, Mr.—er—Mr. Morson?"

"I didn't," denied the brazen gentleman, suppressing a chuckle and rising to his feet. "If you'll kindly excuse me a minute, I'll produce some evidence in rebuttal."

He left her looking after him in grave perplexity, waded out to the wreck, disappeared for a moment or two, and then came sliding down the tilted deck. At the rail he paused, seeming to listen attentively at something, with his head cocked gracefully on one side in the manner of a pointer dog.

"What is it?" Valda called.

"Oh, nothing," he answered back. "I thought—but it doesn't matter. I reckon I was mistaken."

He dropped into the water, waded ashore, and flung himself beside her on the sand, carefully unfolding a sheet of moist and rather crumpled note paper.

"It's a trifle wet," he apologized, "but I think you'll find it legible. Do you recognize the handwriting?"

"Why, yes," she admitted. "It's Polly's, of course; but why should she write to you?"

"Read it," he suggested, in a voice so gentle, so tender in its tone, that Valda's heart for a moment stirred with jealousy; but she took the note, and, with ever increasing wonder, deciphered its girlish scrawl. It ran as follows:

MY DEAR MR. MORSON:—

I hope you won't think me forward or in any way frisky for doing this; but I've thought it all over, and I must.

People—I won't mention names, because it isn't very nice to do so—but people (don't try to guess who, please) say horrid, insinuating things about you. But, dear Mr. Morson, I don't believe it—not the least tiny bit.

I know you are poor, although you told me a big white fib and said you were not. But when you came to us, you didn't have a coat even, and those men were perfectly villainous wretches to throw you off the tug. I'm not very rich myself, or else I would send you more, and this is awfully little—yes, awfully! If it makes you feel badly to take it from a girl, you can pay it back when you get started again; but I don't need it, really, and it will be all right if you keep it for years and years.

Now please forgive me, Mr. Morson, and I do hope to see you again some day; but please don't say anything about this if you see me tomorrow, because I should certainly burst out crying like a silly little goose and everybody would know all about it and scold me for being one. So good-by. Think of me sometimes, and remember that I don't believe a word of it.

Respectfully,

POLLY THURMAN.

For a long time Valda sat with the girlish scrawl held tightly in her hand, then she folded it with a sort of reverence and handed it back to him without a word.

"Dear little Polly!" he murmured, half inaudibly. "In other circumstances——"

"You'd love her for it," finished Valda, though her voice was trembling as she spoke. "Mr. Morson," she continued, "it was I who said the horrid, insinuating things about you, and now I'm afraid to ask—as Polly asked you—to forgive."

"Oh, that's all right," he answered, smiling at her earnestness. "You were perfectly justified in suspecting me all along; and then you were quite as fine as Polly when you thought me a worthless, thieving rascal, yet held your tongue. I won't forget it, Miss Valda—no, not as long as I live—but I want you to know the rest." He paused for an instant, pouring little streams of sand through his strong brown fingers, and seemed to swallow something in his strong brown throat. "With that note came a roll of money—fifty dollars—and do you know, it touched me—deep down in the inside—where a fellow stores away the sacred things of life."

Once more he paused, and Valda noted the faint suspicion of a tear in both voice and eyes, though he hid it as best he could.

"Of course," he added, "I couldn't accept it from the child—God bless her bully little heart! —not even if I were starving—so I wrote her a note, lied beautifully about my financial status,

then crept like a thief through your dining-room and pushed the note and money under Polly's stateroom door. I heard a noise as I was sneaking out—I dare say it was you—so I made for cover. And here comes the funny part of it. In the main saloon, which I had to pass through to get to the dining-room, I had taken off my shoes, after the manner of all enlightened burglars, and I had to come back for them in order to remove the incriminating evidence. I waited for half an hour, perhaps, and when I peeped again into the saloon, I saw you kneeling before the open safe. You struck a match, and naturally I scooted. Later I returned and successfully carried off my shoes, together with certain inferences concerning you. Now that," he concluded, "is every blessed thing!"

"No," corrected Valda, "it isn't. Why didn't you tell all this when Dad was asking questions?"

The Southerner shrugged and spread his hands.

"How could I? In the first place, it would have been a most ungrateful trick to make a back gate of poor little Polly's secret; and as for my gems, well, I thought *you* had them. I couldn't imagine why, but that was your affair, and if you chose to say nothing about it and see me go to jail——"

Valda stopped him.

“And you thought that of me?” she asked, in pathetic condemnation of his disbelief in her.

“Yes,” he admitted; “I confess it with shame, but I did. I just felt, Miss Valda, that with you against me I didn’t care *what* happened. I couldn’t tell your father I was willing to work among his sailors for *your* sake. I couldn’t tell him, could I, that I didn’t try to get back my gems because *you* had them? Why, good Lord, girl! you could *keep* the things if you wanted to—for whatever reason you chose—or anything else I owned, or hoped to own, on the top side of the whole darned earth! I can’t tell you *why* just now; but *you* know what I mean, and I’m going to tell you too, the very minute I can prove that I’m straight and clean and not the man to deceive you with ridiculous lies—to steal my own property and be jackass enough to put dried beans in— Well, *by George!*”

Mr. Morson had stopped suddenly and began staring, not at her, but in the sand, as though he had forgotten all about her in the wonder of some new and strange discovery. With a species of not uncomfortable alarm, Valda had been conscious of the fact that Mr. Bruce Morson of Virginia was *almost* making love to her. What was her positive amazement, then, when

he broke off in the very middle of his threatened declaration, exclaimed "By George!" and sat glaring at nothing in particular. Besides, she had noticed something else peculiar in the man's demeanor. From time to time, and, indeed, ever since his return from the Spitfire with Polly's note, he had been glancing cautiously toward the wreck as though he expected it to float away or otherwise conduct itself in some unseemly manner.

"What is it?" she asked, referring timidly to his thoughtful attitude.

"Dried beans," he answered irrelevantly, adding to himself in rapt abstraction: "What a fool I was to let it get by before. *By George!*"

"But, really," protested Valda, who possessed her own full share of feminine curiosity, "I don't understand at all. In fact—"

"S-sh!" he cautioned, once more cocking his head, after the fashion of a pointer dog. "Don't turn suddenly, but look at the yacht out of the corner of your eye. Isn't that some one creeping along the deck? Forward—by the rail!"

She looked discreetly, as directed, and sure enough she too could see the figure of a man who had caught her friend's attention. Whoever the man was, he was moving with the utmost care, dodging behind convenient piles of wreck-

age and turning his head from time to time to note if his actions were observed.

“Why, it’s *Miggs!*” she whispered. “Good gracious me! What *ever* is he doing? Is he *crazy!*”

Bruce Morson smiled grimly, but made no answer, while *Miggs*, in the comforting belief that he had not been seen by those on shore, attached a rope to the *Spitfire*’s rail, slipped noiselessly over the side, and disappeared. The yacht was now between him and those who might spy upon his actions; yet presently he came into view again. He was in the water and had turned upon his back, swimming with only his face above the surface.

“Now what on earth can the idiot be about?” asked Valda, trembling with suppressed excitement. “Do you think he wants to get away?”

“Wait,” said Mr. Morson, still smiling to himself. “He evidently has his reasons.”

This certainly seemed to be the case; for *Miggs* continued to swim, with his body entirely submerged, till he reached a point some thirty yards below the watchers, where a sandy hummock ran to the water’s edge. Here *Miggs* crawled out and dodged behind the rise; then, stopping, began to move away by stealth.

“*Hi there!*” called Morson, springing suddenly to his feet. “*You Miggs!* Come here!”

The steward gave one terrified glance over his shoulder and began to run. Morson snatched up the gun and discharged one barrel in the air; but the only effect it seemed to have on Miggs was to cause him to duck his head and race down the beach like a full grown jack rabbit pressed for time.

“Too bad,” sighed Mr. Morson, “but it can’t be helped.”

Once more the shot gun leaped against his shoulder, but this time pointed accurately in line with a pair of flying legs. There was a sharp report, followed almost instantaneously by a gratifying howl, and Miggs leaped high and fell groveling on the sand.

“Oh, how *could* you!” demanded Valda, in pity, but more in honest wrath. The would-be murderer only grinned.

“Don’t worry,” he urged. “I merely stung him up a bit, and besides he’s a bird—but exceptionally valuable. Come along.”

When they reached the ministerial one, he was lying flat upon his face and moaning feebly, though wounded more in imagination than in corporal reality; albeit the sudden presentation of some twenty number six shot when one’s back is turned, is not an affair to be viewed with levity.

“Get up!” commanded the marksman, and

Miggs rose slowly to his feet. "Now oblige me, please, and shell out!" The culprit looked sullenly defiant, while Mr. Morson set his lips in a hard, straight line. "All right," he said, as he slid in another cartridge and snapped his gun, "I'll give you just half a minute to decide, then I'm going to step off twenty yards and let you have it. Take your choice."

He waited in patient silence, then sighed and began to move away, but the terror-stricken Miggs limped after him.

"Oh, please, Mr. Brown, sir—as Gawd's me judge—"

"Too late!" growled his heartless captor. "Besides, I'd rather shoot you, anyway. Still, if you prefer to make a square, clean breast of it—"

"Yes, sir," whined the ministerial scamp—and produced the missing gems.

CHAPTER XXIII

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

VALDA GIRARD gazed with a species of stupefaction from one to the other of the two men before her, while the roots of a well-nigh dead suspicion began to put forth little sprigs of green. No one had dreamed for an instant that Miggs was connected with the stolen gems. How had he got them? Why was he hiding on the stranded yacht? Could it be that he was merely a receiver—an inconspicuous pawn which acted as a buffer for the more important pieces in the game? Then who were these important pieces? The answer rose unbidden—Ormond, Tracy, and George C. Brown. If, after all, this precious trio were in collusion— Oh, good gracious!

This was depressing. On the other hand Miss Valda's heart now pounced upon a hope. There was Polly's note! Surely that was genuine! Then too, Mr. Morson, of his own accord, had called her attention to the escaping steward; otherwise he would have got clean away, un-

noticed, and free to bury the affair in everlasting mystery. Therefore Valda trampled on her doubts and turned slowly to the Southerner.

“How—how did you know?” she asked.

“Dried beans,” he responded promptly, displaying his abominably even teeth. “If I hadn’t been handicapped in the first place by the belief that you—I mean—that somebody else had cracked the safe, I should certainly have elected the illustrious Miggs at once.”

“Why?”

“Simply because he was the one person on board, not counting the cook, who was most likely to have dried beans in his possession. Besides, he looks just a shade too virtuous to be entirely square. His own sanctimoniousness casts the first stone at him. Again, if he had been innocent of guile, he would have called to us when he first appeared just now, instead of trying to sneak away. Am I clear?”

“Perfectly,” said Valda. “Miggs, I am utterly ashamed of you!”

“Yes’m,” sniveled Miggs, and dug one foot into the sand.

Bruce Morson regarded him thoughtfully.

“Now, my friend,” he began, “we want the truth of this matter, and we want it quick. You may tell it your own way; but we want it all. If you try to conceal anything——”

He paused significantly and patted his gun with an air of positive affection, sighting along the barrels and smiling to himself in the sweet, anticipatory joy of blowing a fellow creature into Kingdom Come. The steward's knees began to act suspiciously; so Valda mercifully came to his rescue.

"Miggs," she said, with a shade of reservation, "we don't intend to injure you—and certainly not if you are absolutely truthful. Now tell me everything—at once; but don't you dare to cover up! Since you are wounded, you may sit down."

Miggs looked a trifle dubious.

"Beg pardon, Miss Valda, but—but if Mr. Brown don't mind, I—I'd rawther stand up, Miss Valda—if you'll be so good."

The lady could not see Mr. Morson, who was just behind her, but felt that he was grinning, though he made no sign.

"Very well," she agreed, addressing the afflicted one, "you may do as you please, only tell us what we want to know. Now, begin at the beginning."

"Yes'm," responded Miggs, eying the shotgun most respectfully and going at his subject matter with commendable directness. "It was this a-way. I was in the galley w'en Mr. Ormon' 'e come with the jools, an'—an' awskin

your pardon, Miss Valda, I listened w'ilst you was a-dressin' of 'im down."

"Excellent!" commented Morson, smiling broadly. "*That* statement bears the stamp of truth, anyway. She was dressin' of 'im down, you say? Go on."

"Yes, sir," answered Miggs, and turned once more to Valda. "I seen 'im give 'em to you—the jools, I mean—an' 'eard you say as 'ow you was a-goin' to put 'em in the safe. I didn't mean nothink by listnin', Miss Valda. It was jus' casual, as you might say. No more did I 'ave no intentions of takin' of 'em—honest to Gawd I didn't!—but I got to calculatin'."

"Calculating?" interrupted Morson. "Calculating what?"

"'Ot plates," affirmed the ministerial one, with the utmost gravity. "You see, sir, it was this way. The cook 'e cooks heverythink, to be sure; but I 'as to serve it, sir. At breakfas' there's fifteen 'ot plates, not countin' the cups an' the hegg cups. At luncheon there's twenty, sir, an' at dinner there's forty 'ot plates, not to mention twiced as many cold ones for the crew—an' hevery bloomin' one of 'em got to be washed hup hafterwards. So you see, sir——"

"One moment," Valda interposed. "I hardly see, Miggs, what these hot plates, innumerable as they may be, can possibly have to do with the

present subject. Please be a little more explicit."

"Yes'm," said **Miggs** respectfully. "I'm a-comin' to it now. Concernin' of the 'ot plates, though, you might not think that seventy-five—or heven a 'undred—was many in one day, Miss Valda; but w'en you calculates it for a year, there's more'n twenty-nine thousan', Mr. Brown, sir, more'n twenty-nine thousan'."

The culinary mathematician paused, gazing sadly out to sea in the weariness of his own reflections.

"Yes, yes," exclaimed Valda, with a shade of impatience. "Go on, please! We are waiting."

The steward started from his reverie and came back to earth:

"So you see, Mr. Brown, sir——"

"Morson," corrected Valda. "His name is Mr. Morson."

"Thank you, ma'am," said **Miggs**, bowing in apology. "So you see, Mr. Morson, sir, I got to thinkin' that if honly I 'ad them jools, I'd never 'ave to serve another damn—beg pardon, Miss Valda—'ot plate s'long as I lived, if I didn't want to. An' I don't—Gawd knows I don't!"

In other circumstances his listeners might have laughed; but there seemed to be something so pathetic in this primal cause of sin, that

neither Valda nor Morson had any desire for merriment. They had never till now considered the grinding monotony of serving hot plates, day in day out, till their number ran into fiery thousands, nor did they fail to understand that such a lingering, hopeless lot in life might drive a man to crime.

"Go on," said Mr. Morson, kindly. "Tell us how you opened the safe. Did you know the combination?"

"No, sir, not at first; but"—Miggs paused to glance at Valda nervously—"but Miss Valda she 'ad the numbers writ down on a bit of paper, sir, in 'er pocketbook, cause she could hallways remem—"

"Miggs!" said the former mistress of the Spitfire, sitting up very straight and speaking sharply, "what were you doing with my pocketbook?"

"Lookin' for the combination, ma'am," returned the steward, simply and without an effort at evasion. "If it 'adn't been for that, I couldn't 'ave pinched them jools."

"Pinched?"

"Yes'm—took 'em. An' if I 'adn't got 'em, Mr. Ormon' 'e would, 'cause 'im an' Mr. Tracy was a-goin' to do it the nex' night, Mr. Bro—er—Mr. Morson, sir. I 'eard 'em plannin' of it myself. They's deep 'uns, Miss Valda, an' Mr.

Ormon' 'e hain't no more a hofficer o' the law than I am—yes'm—an'____"

"Wait a minute," ordered Morson. "If you overheard Ormond and Tracy planning to do this thing, you must have listened deliberately, and rather artfully too. How did you do it?"

"Swung over the side by a rope, sir, an' 'arkened at the port'ole."

"Ah!" breathed Mr. Morson. "That was clever of you, Miggs. You had some reason to suspect them?"

"Yes, sir."

"How so?"

"They kep' a 'intin', sir."

"A what?"

"He means hinting," Valda explained. "At what did they hint, Miggs?"

The steward hesitated.

"It's 'ard to say, Miss Valda; but Mr. Tracy 'e done it—ast leadin' questions, as you might say—nothink pos'tive; but I knowed wot 'e was hup to, an' I throwd 'im down."

"What did you tell him?" asked Morson; but once more the culprit hesitated. "The truth, remember. Out with it!"

"Told 'im to go to 'ell, sir."

The Southerner's eyes began to twinkle, and his mouth was twitching at the corners.

“Did he go, Miggs?”

“No, sir.”

The Cockney made his statement solemnly and with a strict regard for truth, for the angel of humor had failed to hover above his cradle; and, indeed, that ethereal lady is said to be somewhat shy of Great Britain, anyway.

“I wouldn’t ‘ave nothink to do with ‘em,” continued Miggs, now fairly launched on the track of truth; “but ‘im an’ Mr. Ormon’ they put the hidea in me ‘ead. They’s a couple o’ crooks, Miss Valda—yes’m, if it’s me las’ word —both of ‘em!”

“Well, never mind the crooks,” said Valda. “You have quite enough to answer for yourself. Where did you hide the gems when father and all the rest of us were looking for them?”

A gleam of humor seemed to penetrate the opacity of the Cockney’s soul; for, in spite of his efforts, his features contracted in a faint, wan smile.

“I ’id ‘em in your stateroom, Miss Valda—at the bottom of the little corny-copey thing w’ere you keeps your combin’s.”

“Her which?” asked Mr. Morson, groping for some occult meaning; but Valda herself enlightened him, explaining that the “corny-copey thing” was a paper receptacle wherein were deposited from time to time such disjunctive

strands of a lady's hair as adhered to the comb and were used—with effect—in creating a quasi-artificial though otherwise satisfactory aid to Nature's disgusting lack of generosity.

"Thank you profoundly," said Bruce Morson, with a bow. "Now, Miggs, to proceed. Your genius in hiding the gems in Miss Girard's own stateroom is above reproach; but I'm seeking information on another point. Why, in the name of the seven variegated devils, did you put dried beans in that cigar case?"

The steward answered without a moment's hesitation:

"I done it, sir, 'cause I thought about wot Miss Valda would do, an' acted accordin', sir."

"Meaning, if you please, just what?"

"Well, sir," came the more explicit answer, "it was this a-way. W'en I hopened that 'ere safe, I pinched—I mean, I look—the whole jolly thing, Mr. Morson, sir, intendin' for to 'ide the jools an' chuck the cigar case hoverboard. But I got to thinkin'. 'Miggs,' says I to meself, 'wot would you do if you was Miss Girard an' 'ad put them val'ables in the safe?' 'W'y,' says I, answerin' me question, 'I'd be rawther keen on lookin' in that safe every wunst in a while, jus' to see if anybody 'ad snit—er—pinched 'em.' 'Would you look *in* the case?' says I to meself again. 'No,' I answers back, 'I wouldn't.'

I'd maybe jus' *feel* of it an' shut the safe door quick like?" "

The narrator paused to dart a look of apology in Valda's direction for the liberty he took in borrowing her powers of reason, then once more addressed himself to Mr. Morson:

"So you see, sir, I put them beans in that 'ere case and put it back, thinkin' as 'ow Miss Valda would jus' take 'old of it an' rattle it, as you might say. An' then, sir, w'en Mr. Ormon' an' Mr. Tracy was gone off the yacht and the case was looked into, w'y, sir, she'd think *they* done it, or—awskin' your pardon, Mr. Morson, sir—it might be *you*."

Mr. Morson smiled feebly.

"Very thoughtful of you, Miggs. You touch me—deeply."

"Thank you, sir," returned the steward. "I intended for to scatter a few odd beans aroun' in your room, sir; but Mr. Girard 'e come aboard rawther suddint, an' I didn't 'ave no chanst."

Bruce Morson regarded him with increasing admiration.

"My gratitude for the coming of Mr. Girard," he observed. "No wonder, Miggs, that you wearied of 'ot plates when your talents point conclusively to a higher sphere of art. Now one more thing. What was your object in run-

ning chances by staying on board a sinking yacht?"

"There *weren't* no objeck," declared the honest Englishman. "'W'y, sir, w'en that 'ere thunder storm got to bangin' aroun' in the 'eavens, it put me in a bleedin' funk, sir, an' I went hoff an' 'id in the'old. It seem like to me, sir, that storm was gettin' personal, as you might say, an' w'en the crash come, I *knowed* it! So I stays w'ere I was, Mr. Morson, sir, till the water come in and drove me hout, an' then——"

"I see," the Southerner interrupted. "That will do. Now ask Miss Girard to excuse you, and we will adjourn for a time to the Spitfire. Do you happen to have a knife?"

"Wot—wot you goin' to do, sir?" asked the miserable Miggs, trembling from teeth to toes at terrifying possibilities, while Valda also made an inquiry with her big brown eyes. The inquisitor reassured them.

"Oh, you needn't worry, Miggs," he answered lightly. "We are grateful to you for having unburdened yourself morally, and now I shall try—with the aid of your pocket knife—to do the same for you physically. I allude to the shot you are carrying. Come along."

He led the way toward the yacht, the steward following meekly, and together they disappeared into a cabin which remained above the water

line. Here the patient was divested of a portion of his clothing and laid face downward in a bunk, with a pillow to chew on, while Bruce Morson of Virginia appointed himself as surgeon in charge, operating without chloroform or any marked degree of professional experience.

It will be quite impossible for the reader to even faintly imagine the anguish of poor Miggs, unless, indeed, he has experienced the rare sensation of having a dozen or more number six shot picked out of his person by an amateur with a dull instrument. The writer is in a position to speak feelingly upon the subject; and his heavy handed operator—who afterwards presided in a meat market—did it with a Barlow knife. Peace to his ashes!

Having ensconced the ministerial one as comfortably as possible in a temporary hospital prison to await the coming of Marcus Girard, the self satisfied surgeon returned to the beach where Valda was awaiting him. To her well oiled intuition there was something in the very cockiness of his walk which sounded an alarm. If he started in again on a declaration, it was seven to one that he would not interrupt himself by any reflective “By Georges!” so she strove

to ward him off by the introduction of alien topics of discussion.

"Mr. Morson," she began, though rather nervously, "I am utterly ashamed of myself, and ashamed of father too, for the way he—we, I mean—have treated you."

Mr. Morson laughed.

"Now don't you waste your sympathies on father. He's a brick. He believed every word I told him."

"What!" gasped Valda, in open mouthed astonishment. "Father! Believed you?"

"Certainly," he answered showing almost every tooth he owned. "Your father told me so."

"But," she protested, "why should he order you to be tied up, hand and foot? I don't understand at all."

"No," said Morson, "neither did Mr. Girard—that is, entirely—but he acted according to his lights. He believed that Ormond and Tracy had taken my gems and hidden them; so he played a mighty pretty little game. Of course he could easily have trussed up the two scamps as he did me; but in that case he ran a risk of losing the gems. On the other hand, if he worked his pumps on me, it would throw those fellows off their guard; then, when they got ready to leave the yacht, with the goods in their

possession, your father was going to nab them.” The young man paused to smile at her. “Do you see now why I said he was a brick?”

“Yes,” murmured Valda, looking thoughtfully at the sand. “I see. But *I’m* not a brick, for I treated you—er—perfectly shamefully from first to last.”

Now this was scarcely an alien topic. It was perilously near to the very subject which she wished—in a way—to shun; yet, since he made no answer, she stole a cautious glance at him.

“Can—can you ever forgive me,” she asked, “for—for harboring such horrid outrageous doubts of you?”

“On the contrary” he laughed, “I’m very glad you had them.”

Valda stared at him.

“But, for goodness gracious sake, Mr. Morrison, *why?*”

“Because,” he answered, chuckling to himself as he edged a little closer to her side, “because by this time you are so utterly sick and tired of circumstantial evidence, that you’ll be far easier to manage when I marry you.”

Miss Valda Girard jumped—that is to say, her heart did, and continued the vivifying exercise until she was quite bewildered. Several gentlemen had proposed to her on various oc-

casions; but in every instance they had *asked* for the honor of taking charge of her for life. This one, however, presumed to take her—brazenly—whether she wanted to or not; therefore—even though she did want to be taken, more than she wanted anything else in the whole world—she sprang to her feet and ran away—ingloriously.

She did not know exactly where she was running, because she was blinded by tears and terror and a jumbly sort of delightful, ecstatic misery. She only knew she was trying to escape, and that Mr. Morson was flying after her; then she tripped and fell head over heels in a sand dune. This made her angry; but there wasn't any time for anger, for he overtook her and flung himself beside her in the sand and caught her brutally in his strong brown arms.

Of course she struggled with him—as hard as ever she could; but he only laughed and drew her to him and looked into her eyes with his impish gray ones. And then he kissed her. Oh, how dared he! To kiss her on the mouth!

It was hateful of him; though he did not confine his insults to that one particular feature, but distributed them over cheeks and eyes and chin impartially, then came back to the mouth for the sake of good measure and other reasons; while Valda herself—because of the very morti-

fication of it—cried at least a gill and was forced to hide her face on the beautiful devil's shoulder.

“Now, then, my dear,” said Mr. Morson-Brown at length, “aren't you perfectly, absolutely *furious* again?”

“No,” sobbed the spitfire, “not a bit!”

CHAPTER XXIV

TRACES OF MR. TRACY

IT is needless, no doubt, to state how the Horsehair came plowing through a sparkling sea, prowling along the Jersey coast in the mournful hope of recovering the washed-up body of Miss Girard; but it did do that very thing, so we put it down. Some one on board spied the wreck of the Spitfire, and boats were put out with a sorrowing company who came ashore.

It is needless also to dwell upon the satisfaction of old Marcus Girard on discovering his daughter alive and well, or the chirrupy delight of Miss Polly Thurman on discovering Mr. Morson-Brown-Jonah alive and well—a delight so purely ingenuous that the emotional young lady in question tumbled out of the boat, but, fortunately, in shallow water. We put all this down too, though Miss Polly declares it to be not only utterly false and slanderous, but a mean advantage to take of a girl's purely platonic interest in a comparative stranger. The

entire statement, she says, was manufactured; and, besides, she didn't mind getting wet, anyway.

Valda smoothed her hair and endeavored to look as if nothing unusual had happened—and succeeded in deceiving at least two of the sailors who had never before laid eyes on her.

“Mr. Morson,” said Marcus Girard, when the feminine sobs and other hysterical demonstrations subsided sufficiently to give the old gentleman a chance, “if it hadn't been for you and your pesky jewelry—confound you!—I wouldn't have lost that rather expensive yacht.”

“No, sir,” returned the young man gravely, though the imps were once more dancing in his eyes; “but if it hadn't been for me, you might not have had a chance to swap your yacht for a rather expensive son-in-law.”

“Well, damn your impudence!” said Marcus Girard—and extended a cordial hand.

Of course you are not the least bit interested in all this; nor is it quite fair to tell tales on the placid old Aunt Mary; but we do it, anyhow. She forgot the traditions of her rare upbringing—forgot that delicacy engendered by refinement—and said to Valda, concerning the Morsons of Virginia:

“I told you so!”

You will doubtless judge Aunt Mary very harshly; but, on the other hand, she never had a husband of her own; so do be generous and allow the dear old hen to crow—just once.

The foregoing, as said before, is needless. It is no concern of ours whether the miserable Miggs was clapped in jail, or partially forgiven and condemned to serve some twenty-nine thousand more 'ot plates in expiation of his one and only sin; but you are, we believe, just a little curious as to Ormond and Tracy and their ultimate lot in life.

When on the previous night the Horsehair had run for safety into harbor, the two enterprising gentlemen had cast about them, so to speak, for a forelock of Father Time. They found it—and pulled it out by the roots.

Had Marcus Girard not been so distracted over the loss of his precious daughter, he might have done well to keep a weather eye on the actions of a certain pair of scalawags; yet in this he failed, to his everlasting sorrow and regret. He had wished to punish brother Ormond for coming a shade too near the truth with regard to the business relations between a certain financier and the great Panjandrums who sit at Washington, D. C. But, when morning dawned,

one of the Horsehair's boats was missing, and a virtuous brace of birds had flitted away to parts unknown.

Now, in a novel, it would be eminently proper to come upon them dramatically, to place them in long and satisfactory captivity, and—if a happy ending is desired—reform them; but, in real life, they were far too smart to sacrifice their selfish persons to any such absurdity. They got away.

It would take the reader far too long to track and run down these rascals by himself; so, to save time and trouble, we generously supply the information, demanding no extra charge. What's that? Oh, don't mention it. You're entirely welcome!

In a cabin on an inconspicuous craft, bound for Brazil, or some other South American retreat, where fields for progressive talent are said to blossom as the rose, two passengers were gazing through two respective portholes toward the receding silhouette of Sandy Hook.

“Jim,” said one of these seekers after health, in a tone of soulful, lingering regret, “if only you and me had done it different——”

“Tracy,” the other interrupted, with pathetic patience born of frequent reiteration, “will you keep your damned mouth shut!”

The tactful Tracy made no answer. What was the use? Besides—in this somewhat smug-gloous, pokerous life of ours—it isn't such a bad rule to follow.

THE END

